# SOUTH OF THE RIO GRANDE

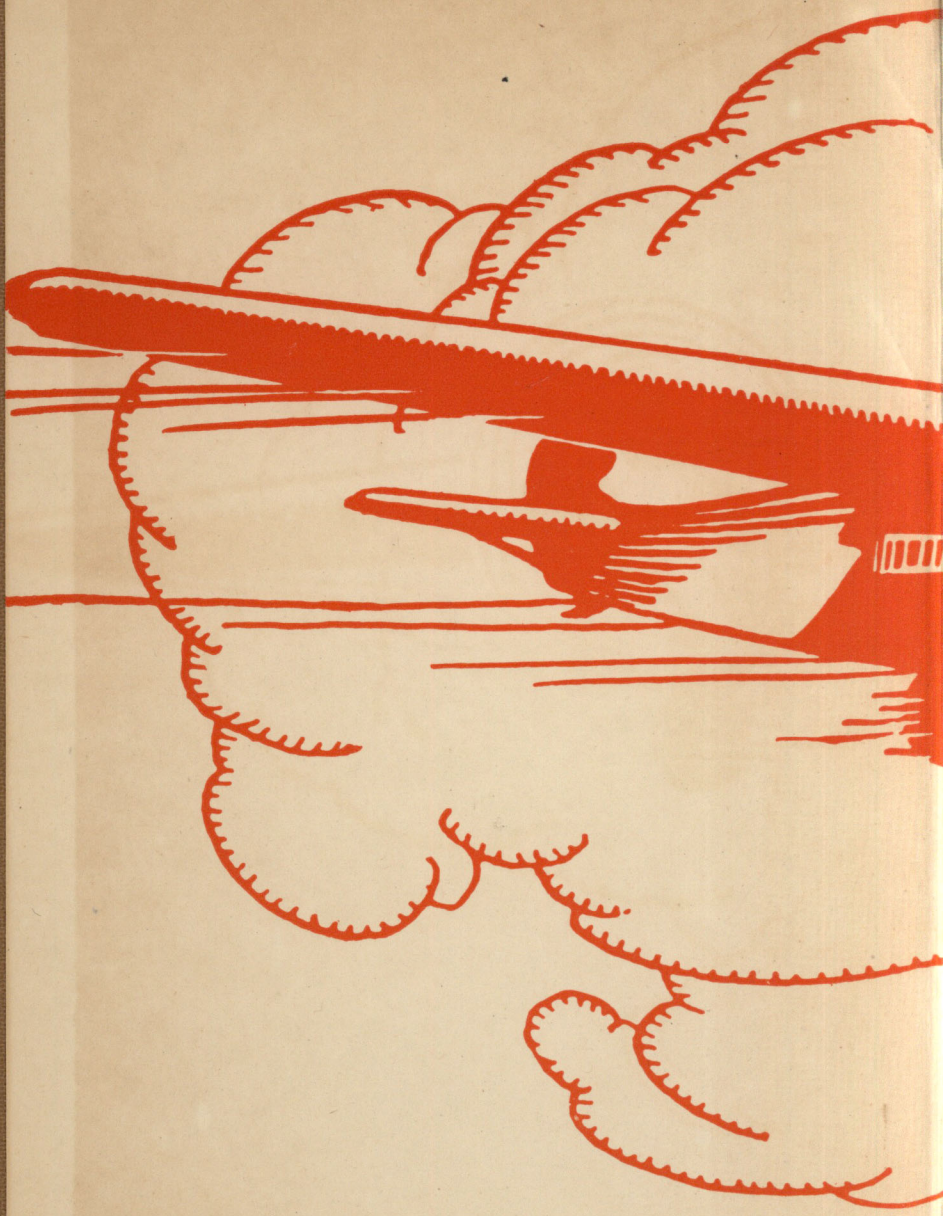
Ted Scott
Flying Stories

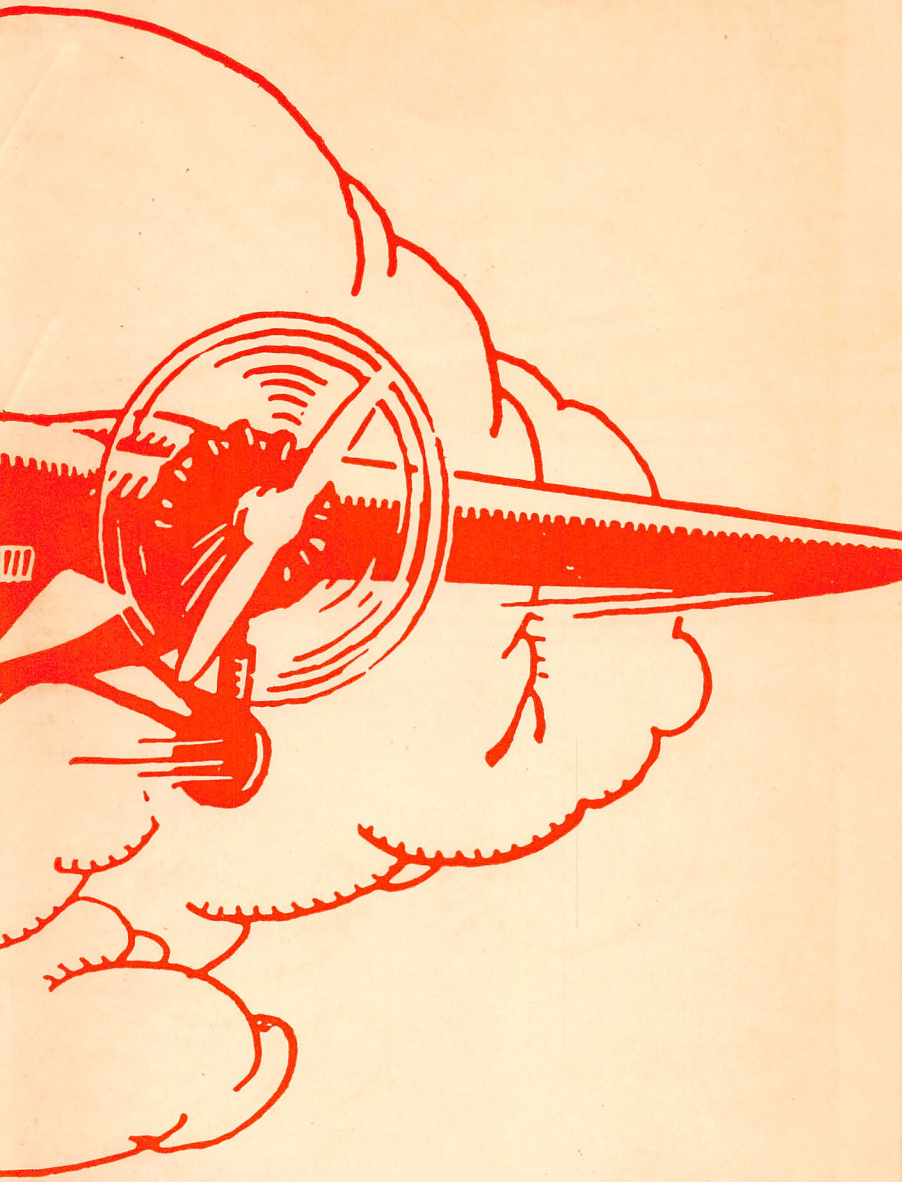
FRANKLIN W. DIXON

# SOUTH OF THE RIO GRANDE

F·W·
DIXON

GROSSET
& DUNLAP





TED'S FOOT SLIPPED ON A TREACHEROUS BIT OF MOSS.
*South of the Rio Grande.* *Frontispiece (Page 139)*

THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

# SOUTH OF THE RIO GRANDE

OR

TED SCOTT ON A SECRET MISSION

By

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

AUTHOR OF
"OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS"
"THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST FLYERS"
"THE HARDY BOYS: HUNTING FOR HIDDEN GOLD," ETC.

*ILLUSTRATED BY*

WALTER S. ROGERS

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

# BOOKS FOR BOYS

By FRANKLIN W. DIXON

12mo. Cloth. Illustrated.

## THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS
Or Ted Scott's Daring Long-Distance Flight
RESCUED IN THE CLOUDS
Or Ted Scott, Hero of the Air
OVER THE ROCKIES WITH THE AIR MAIL
Or Ted Scott Lost in the Wilderness
FIRST STOP HONOLULU
Or Ted Scott Over the Pacific
THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST FLYERS
Or Ted Scott Over the West Indies
SOUTH OF THE RIO GRANDE
Or Ted Scott on a Secret Mission

## THE HARDY BOYS MYSTERY STORIES

THE HARDY BOYS: THE TOWER TREASURE
THE HARDY BOYS: THE HOUSE ON THE CLIFF
THE HARDY BOYS: THE SECRET OF THE OLD MILL
THE HARDY BOYS: THE MISSING CHUMS
THE HARDY BOYS: HUNTING FOR HIDDEN GOLD
THE HARDY BOYS: THE SHORE ROAD MYSTERY

(Other volumes in preparation)

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

Copyright, 1928, by
GROSSET & DUNLAP, INC.

*All Rights Reserved*

South of the Rio Grande

Made in the United States of America

# TO THE HEROES OF THE AIR

WILBUR WRIGHT—ORVILLE WRIGHT
The first men to fly in a heavier-than-air machine

LOUIS BLERIOT
The first to fly the English Channel

CAPTAIN JOHN ALCOCK
The first to fly from Newfoundland to Ireland

COMMANDER RICHARD E. BYRD
In command flying over the North Pole

COLONEL CHARLES A. LINDBERGH
First to fly alone from New York to Paris

CLARENCE D. CHAMBERLIN
First to fly from New York to Germany

LIEUTENANTS LESTER J. MAITLAND—ALBERT F. HEGENBERGER
First to fly from California to Hawaii

CAPTAIN HERMANN KOEHL—COMMANDANT JAMES C. FITZMAURICE
First to fly Westward across the North Atlantic—Ireland to Greenely Island

CAPTAIN GEORGE H. WILKINS—CARL B. EIELSON
First to fly over the Polar Sea from Alaska to Spitzbergen,

And a host of other gallant airmen of the Past and Present who, by their daring exploits, have made aviation the wonderful achievement it is to-day

THIS SERIES OF BOOKS
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

# CONTENTS


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I | The Midnight Prowlers | 1 |
| II | A Flying Leap | 16 |
| III | The Plotters Foiled | 28 |
| IV | Off for Mexico | 37 |
| V | In the Grip of the Storm | 49 |
| VI | Winging through the Air | 56 |
| VII | A Clever Stratagem | 65 |
| VIII | The Mountain Rebel | 72 |
| IX | A Secret Mission | 81 |
| X | Enemies at Work | 90 |
| XI | The Bomb Explodes | 97 |
| XII | The Lightning Bolt | 105 |
| XIII | Turning the Tables | 119 |
| XIV | A Narrow Escape | 126 |
| XV | An Ugly Adversary | 134 |
| XVI | Quick Action | 141 |

| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| XVII | In the Toils | 152 |
| XVIII | Gathering Clouds | 159 |
| XIX | Bound Hands | 165 |
| XX | Behind Prison Bars | 171 |
| XXI | Startling News | 176 |
| XXII | A Dash for Freedom | 181 |
| XXIII | The Shadow of the Noose | 187 |
| XXIV | On the Brink of Doom | 193 |
| XXV | From the Jaws of Death | 202 |

# SOUTH OF THE RIO GRANDE

## CHAPTER I

### The Midnight Prowlers

"Ted, how would you like to fly south of the Rio Grande and over Mexico with me?"

The question was put by Walter Hapworth, a young, bronzed, well-set-up business man of wealth and standing, and the young man addressed was Ted Scott, the famous aviator whose feat in first flying from New York to Paris had made him the idol of the American nation and the admiration of the world.

"You put that so suddenly as almost to take my breath away," replied Ted, with a smile; "but I'm willing to try anything once, especially if it's a thing that you particularly want. Let me in on it. What's the big idea?"

"Oil," replied Mr. Hapworth, briefly. "Mexican oil."

"Which, while interesting, is not very explicit," laughed Ted. "You're certainly not wasting many words."

"Words are dangerous things sometimes," said Walter Hapworth, as he cast a quick glance behind him. "Don't look now, Ted, but when you get a chance take a squint at those two men behind us on the other side of the street."

"I'm on," replied Ted.

The two were walking up the main street of Bromville, a town in the Middle West that had been Ted's home ever since he could remember. Ted Scott had been down to meet Walter Hapworth at the train, for a telegram a little while before this had apprised him of his friend's coming.

A moment later, as though by accident, Ted dropped his handkerchief, and as he turned around to pick it up he cast a swift glance at the men to whom Mr. Hapworth had alluded.

"See them?" asked Hapworth, as they resumed their course.

"Yes," replied Ted. "I didn't get a very favorable impression. Wouldn't like to meet either of them in an alley on a dark night. Who are they? They certainly look like foreigners to me."

"They're Mexicans," replied Hapworth. "The name of the taller one is Ramirez and that of the stocky one is Alvaron. I've seen them both before, in Mexico City, and I've made it my business to find out something about

them. And the more I've learned the less I like it. They know me, but they don't know that I know them. That's the reason they're strolling along with so little attempt at concealment."

"That gives you the advantage," replied Ted. "But what do you make of their presence here? Are they enemies of yours?"

"I don't know, but I suspect they are," answered Mr. Hapworth. "I think they're hirelings of some of my business rivals who are trying to get an inkling of certain plans and projects that I have on hand. I don't know, Ted, whether or not you've ever heard that I have big business interests in Mexico."

"I think you mentioned it to me at one time," responded Ted, cudgeling his memory, "but you never went into details."

"I'm deeply interested in the development of oil wells in Mexico," explained the young business man, "and I have a big deal on hand now that certain other interests would do all in their power to thwart. And they wouldn't be any too scrupulous, either, as to the way they brought it about."

"You have a hunch that these fellows are in their employ?" observed Ted in a questioning tone.

"Yes," replied Hapworth, his face serious. "I've run across them too often to put it down

to chance. I saw them in New York, I saw them in Washington, and when I boarded the train for Bromville they were in the same Pullman. But come along with me to the hotel and I'll tell you all about it."

"Putting up at the Hotel Excelsior as usual, I suppose," remarked Ted as, coming to a corner, he turned in the direction of the hostelry in question.

"Not this time," replied Mr. Hapworth, putting his hand on Ted's arm. "I'm going to the Bromville House now, if Eben and Charity will let me."

"Let you!" exclaimed Ted. "They'll be delighted to have you. So shall I. But you've always put up at the Excelsior, and I took it for granted that you would this time."

"No," said Hapworth. "Brewster Gale, I fancy, would give me a frosty reception. He's hated me ever since I got on to his crookedness in the matter of the golf club business, and now that I've been instrumental in putting those rascally sons of his in jail for their attack on Eben he must hate me worse than ever. No, I'd rather have somebody else for my host."

"Afraid he'd poison your soup?" and Ted grinned.

"Nothing like that," laughed Hapworth. "But he'd be sure to make it uncomfortable for me. So I think I'll try some of Charity's fa-

mous cooking that you're always bragging about."

"You'll find that I haven't told you the half of it," replied Ted, smiling. "Come along and get a royal welcome."

Royal was the only word for that welcome. Eben and Charity Browning, Ted's foster parents and proprietors of the Bromville House, were overjoyed. Any friend of Ted Scott's would have been welcome, but more than all Walter Hapworth, for the Brownings never forgot that it was his generous backing that had given Ted his first opportunity to gain fame and fortune.

He now got the best room in the house, and Charity, happy and a bit flustered, set about preparing a meal that would make her guest forget all about the sumptuous food of the palatial Hotel Excelsior.

"Now," said Ted Scott, as he threw himself into a chair, as soon as Mr. Hapworth had dressed after his train journey and his belongings had been suitably disposed, "let's have the facts about this journey south of the Rio Grande. Why the haste about this trip to Mexico? And why the invitation to me to go along?"

"It's this way, Ted," replied the young business man, as he stretched his legs out comfortably. "As I said, I've invested a good deal of

money in an oil concern in Mexico. The firm is known as the Dono-Apex Oil Company and I'm the heaviest stockholder. Part of the money I've put in it was realized from the sale of the pearls we got in that treasure hunt in the West Indies."

"A pretty snug sum it was, too," remarked Ted Scott, as he reflected with satisfaction on the amount he himself had secured from the sale of his share of the pearls.

"It surely was," acceded Hapworth. "Well, I couldn't find any investment so satisfactory for it as the oil business. Oil, Ted, as you know, is about the biggest thing on earth. It's oil that makes the world go round—the business and manufacturing world, at least. And there's a tremendous amount of oil in Mexico.

"Naturally there are a great many concerns in the business there and competition is very keen. A good many of the firms are thoroughly reputable. But there are others that don't care how they get the money as long as they get it. Things are done there that would freeze your blood, if I told you about them. Of course, many raw deals are put over in our own country in crushing competitors, but Americans usually stop short of murder."

"Murder!" exclaimed Ted, startled.

"That's what I said. You see, Mexico is disturbed by frequent revolutions, things are

unsettled, and men get away with things that couldn't be done here. So one has to watch his step. There are plenty of desperate characters who can be hired to do almost anything, if the pay is good."

"I hope that none of them has marked you for slaughter," put in Ted anxiously.

"Not that, perhaps," returned Hapworth. "In my case it may only be robbery that is contemplated. I have some valuable papers that would be worth a mint of money to one especial concern that is working a field near ours. They have been moving heaven and earth to get possession of some rich adjoining territory on which our people have a prior claim. They have sought to invalidate that claim by alleging that there was a flaw in our title. Some grafting officials are in league with them, and it became necessary for me to make a trip to New York to see the capitalists from whom we secured the property and get from them additional data that would straighten out things and leave our competitors without a leg to stand on.

"There were certain international matters, too, in connection with it that made it necessary for me to go to Washington and secure the backing of our Government. Now I've done all that, and I have papers with me that are precious beyond price. Our competitors would

give their eyes to lay their hands on them."

"I see," said Ted thoughtfully. "Do you think those fellows we saw in the street may be after those papers?"

"Yes," replied Hapworth. "Of course, it's only a suspicion. I haven't a thing really to go on except that they're Mexicans known in Mexico City as desperate and unscrupulous men, ready to hire out for anything to the highest bidder. That I should come across them in New York and in Washington might be only a coincidence, for any one might be seen in great cities like those. But when in addition I see them in a town like Bromville, it's straining things too far to put that down to coincidence. It's natural to think that they're shadowing me and that for no good purpose."

"I think you're right," said Ted. "What do you say to my speaking to Dugan, our chief of police, and have him put the men under surveillance? He's a good friend of mine and will do anything I ask him to."

Walter Hapworth shook his head in the negative.

"No, I don't care to have you do that, Ted. Thank you, just the same," he said. "I have a revolver and will be able to resist any personal attack, if it comes to that. Besides, I have no proof, and if any arrest were made it might put me in an unpleasant position. Then,

too, it might lead to publicity, which I am especially anxious to avoid. In a couple of days from now, if I have luck, I hope to have the papers in the hands of my colleagues in Mexico City. Then I'll draw the first free breath I've had for weeks."

"In a couple of days," repeated Ted. "That's awfully short notice, old fellow. We could hardly do that if we started now. You see that I am assuming that when you asked me to go you wanted to fly."

"Well, yes. But say four or five days then. I could go by train, but that would give these fellows, if they really are after me, any number of chances to do some shady work in the course of the railroad journey. So the thought struck me that, if I could get you to consent, the air trip would be safest and best. I know it's short notice and I wasn't sure what other engagements you had on hand, but I thought I'd take a chance."

"I'm glad you did," returned Ted. "You know there's nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you, Walter. And, as it happens, there's nothing I have on hand just now that would prevent my going. So we'll consider that settled."

"Bully!" cried Hapworth. "How soon can we start?"

"To-morrow, if you like," replied Ted.

"Suits me to a dot," replied Hapworth. "I suppose we'll go in the *Silver Streak?* I have an affection for that plane that carried us over the Pacific and on our trip to the West Indies. She's never let us down yet."

"There's none like her," affirmed Ted, with enthusiasm. "And she's ready to the last strut. I've been overhauling her for the last two weeks and only put the finishing touch to her yesterday. So you've come just in the nick of time. I've made some additions and improvements, and to-day I'm willing to bet there isn't a plane in America that's her match."

"Improvements!" repeated Hapworth. "I thought she was about perfect as she was."

"She was, mechanically," replied Ted Scott. "I haven't made any changes there. But I've made it easier to navigate and to land, especially in fog or darkness. I've put a couple of landing lights that look like eyes in the edge of the wings near the tips that can be turned on together or singly and give a dazzling glare that turns the night into noonday. Then under the fuselage, about half-way back to the tail, there are a couple of pipelike openings from which parachute flares may be dropped. With these changes, night flying will be made safer. You'll see her to-morrow, and you'll admit that the changes have been all for her good."

"Fine!"

"I'll have her refueled in the morning and we'll get off in the afternoon," promised Ted Scott. "Gee, it will be good to be at the old joystick again whizzing along at the rate of a hundred and twenty miles an hour!"

A knock came at the door and Eben Browning looked in.

"Dinner's ready," he said.

"Right with you," said Hapworth, as he and Ted rose from their chairs and followed the proprietor of the Bromville House down the stairs.

A table had been spread in the private dining room of the Brownings, and on it was served a meal that fully sustained Charity's reputation as a wonderful cook. Walter Hapworth was warm in his praises, and Charity's cheeks flushed with pleasure.

"I hope you'll be stayin' with us a good long time, Mr. Hapworth," said Eben. "It is good to see you again."

"And I'm mighty glad to see you once more," replied Hapworth. "But I'm sorry to say that I'll have to be off to-morrow. I'm going to Mexico City."

"Lands sakes!" exclaimed Charity. "Down where them bandits and revolutioners are? I've heard it was mighty dangerous down there."

"Oh, they have a certain rough element there," replied Hapworth, "but they also have

many nice people. Mexico City itself is a beautiful place."

Ted Scott cleared his throat. It was always a difficult thing to announce to these people who loved him as though he were their own son that he was going away on another air journey.

"I've arranged to go along with Mr. Hapworth," he said. "Oh, it won't be for long," he hastened to add, as he saw the consternation his words evoked. "I'll be back in a week or two at the most. Not much more than a little holiday jaunt."

Eben dropped his knife and fork and looked distressed. Tears that she vainly tried to repress started to Charity's eyes.

"Oh, Ted!" she exclaimed. "My dear boy! After all you went through on your last trip with them sharks and devilfish, I was hopin' that you'd be with us for a good long while."

"There won't be any sharks or devilfish on this trip, Mother," Ted hastened to assure her. "The trip will be almost entirely over land. And almost before you know I'm gone, I'll be back again."

"The pitcher that goes to the well too often will be broken at last," mourned Charity, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. "I ain't never been reconciled to your flyin', Ted, an' I never will be."

"But think what flying has brought me,

Mother," urged Ted, reaching across the table and gently patting her hand. "You know how careful I have been and always will be, both for your sake and my own. It's very essential that Mr. Hapworth should be in Mexico City at the earliest possible moment. That's why I'm going."

"Perhaps I'm asking too much," put in Hapworth, moved by the sight of Charity's sorrow.

"No," said Charity, "I'm only a foolish old woman. You're the best friend Ted ever had, Mr. Hapworth, and if it's for you he's doing this I'm perfectly satisfied. After all, the Lord is the Lord of the sky as well as the earth an' I'll leave it all in His hands. I'll be prayin' for you both all the time."

"I know you will, Mother," said Ted gently. "Many a time when I've been in danger, I've felt that it was your prayers that brought me through."

"I had hoped to find Nina and Mr. Monet here," said Hapworth, anxious to change the subject. "I've been so busy these last few weeks that I haven't been able to keep in touch with them."

"They went away about a week ago," replied Eben. "Mr. Monet just waited till he could sell them pearls—an' a mighty good price he got for them, too—an' then he and Nina started for France. I understand that Nina

is going to finish her education there and then they'll travel for a time."

"Nina was a dear girl," said Charity, "an' I was sorry to have her go. She was 'most like a daughter to me. But she's promised to come back again an' pay us a good long visit."

"How about Tom Ralston?" asked Hapworth.

"He's away, also," replied Ted. "He made a good clean-up on his pearls, too. Now I understand he's somewhere down in Texas on Government business of some kind."

They chatted for a while on matters of mutual interest and then rose from the table. Then Hapworth retired to his room while Ted went down town to make arrangements for supplies of food and fuel for the trip.

It was about ten o'clock when Ted returned, after having done all that he could that night. Walter Hapworth's room was near his own, and as he saw light coming from under the door Ted knocked. Hapworth bade him enter.

He had already changed into his pajamas and turned down the sheets of his bed.

"Getting ready for bed so early?" Ted queried, with a smile.

"Yes," rejoined Hapworth, with a yawn. "Had some pretty strenuous days of late and I'm dog tired."

"Go to it," said Ted. "Guess I'll follow

your example. We won't have much sleep while we're flying. Pleasant dreams!"

In a few minutes he himself had undressed and was asleep almost as soon as his head touched the pillow.

It must have been considerably after midnight when Ted awoke with a start. He could not have told what had awakened him. But the sixth sense that had so often stood him in stead warned him of danger.

On the porch roof outside he heard a stealthy step and a sibilant hiss. He jumped out of bed and ran to the window.

Two skulking figures were dimly outlined on the porch roof directly under Walter Hapworth's window. Then the head and shoulders of one were thrust into Hapworth's room!

## CHAPTER II

### A Flying Leap

Like a flash Ted Scott darted toward his bedroom door, flung it open, and ran out into the hall.

He banged on the door of Walter Hapworth's room, after his trial of the knob showed that it was locked.

"Walter! Walter!" he cried. "Wake up! Robbers! Open the door!"

There was no response, but inside the room Ted could hear the sound of a fierce scuffle, the labored breathing of combatants, the knocking over of pieces of furniture.

Ted's first impulse was to break in the door, but it was of heavy oak and he knew it would take too long before it yielded.

He rushed back into his own room and tried to open the window. The catch resisted for a moment. He jerked it aside savagely and threw up the sash. Then he jumped out on the porch.

There was a jog in the building at that point and the porch was not continuous. A distance

of eight feet separated Ted's portion from that which ran under the window of Hapworth's room.

It was a big leap to make in the dark with chances of a nasty fall. But Ted Scott did not hesitate for a moment. He drew back as far as possible so as to get a running start, ran to the edge of the porch and leaped.

The jump carried him over the intervening space, but Hapworth's porch was slippery with the night dew and Ted's feet shot out from under him as he landed and he measured his length on the shingles, sliding nearly to the further edge before he could stop himself.

As he scrambled to his feet he saw two figures emerge from Hapworth's window. One of them carried a small package in his hand.

When they saw Ted, one of the men drew a gleaming knife from his belt, but the other struck at his companion's hand with a snarl.

"Fool!" he snarled. "No killing. We have the papers. Jump!"

Ted jumped for the man nearest him, but his foot slipped as he did so and the man eluded his clutch.

The next moment both of the marauders made a flying leap from the porch roof, landing in a mass of bushes below. A second later, apparently unhurt, they regained their feet and made off down the dark street.

Without a thought but to capture them, Ted Scott jumped also and was after the thieves in hot pursuit, running with the speed of a greyhound.

While the chase is on, it may be well, for the benefit of those who have not read the preceding volumes of this series, to tell who Ted Scott was and what had been his adventures up to the time this story opens.

Ted had no recollection of his father or his mother. When he was old enough to know anything he found himself in the charge of James and Miranda Wilson, two worthy people in humble circumstances who had migrated from New England and settled in Bromville, a town in the Middle West. They had been kind to the little waif, had sent him to school, clothed and fed him well. But when he was about ten years old James and Miranda died within a few months of each other, and Ted was left to the mercy of the world.

Eben and Charity Browning, a childless couple, took pity on the little fellow and adopted him. They soon grew to love him dearly, and he in turn gave them all his heart's affection.

Eben Browning was the proprietor of the Bromville House, which had once been the chief hostelry of the town. But with the growth of the town the old hotel found it hard to hold its own. The Devally-Hipson Aero Corporation

established there a mammoth airplane plant and Bromville rapidly developed into a thriving city. Hosts of employees settled there, together with the executives of the big concern. New hotels sprang up to meet the need. They had all the modern improvements, and the time-worn and rather shabby Bromwell House could not compete with them.

The chief blow fell when the Hotel Excelsior was opened. This was a really palatial hotel with magnificent suites of rooms, wide verandas, beautiful grounds, a band pavilion and all the other appurtenances seldom found outside the great cities. Its attractions were enhanced by a splendid golf course, so excellent that it attracted golfers from all parts of the country and became the choice for many national tournaments.

Its proprietor was Brewster Gale, a domineering, puffy-jowled individual whose only aim in life was to make money, no matter by what means.

The new hotel, with which he could not begin to cope, threatened to throw Eben Browning into bankruptcy, and his dreams began to be haunted by fears of the sheriff.

He could have faced the competition with what philosophy he could muster, had it not been that he had a special grievance against Brewster Gale. The grievance was well-

founded, for at one time Eben had owned all the land on which the Hotel Excelsior was situated and the golf links had been laid out. Gale had come to Eben and offered to buy. The price he offered was a good one and Eben sold the land to him, receiving a deposit of a few hundred dollars to bind the sale. But that was all the money that Eben Browning got. By a series of maneuvers known to men of Gale's character—reorganizations, forced sales, exchanges and other legal hocus-pocus—the bewildered Eben found himself gouged out of his property while Gale had possession with what seemed to be a clear title.

As Ted grew older he did all he could to help the old folks along, doing chores about the hotel, painting and repairing where he could, making the grounds as attractive as possible.

When he was old enough he got work at the airplane plant. He was a natural mechanic and in addition was intensely interested in anything that pertained to airplanes. He loved his work and was so industrious and likable that he was rapidly promoted, going from one department to a higher until he knew all there was to know about the making of planes. He earned good wages and was glad to be able to aid Eben and Charity in their struggle.

A flying circus came to town and Ted was

thrilled by the daring maneuvers of the airmen. He longed to be a flyer. But how could he go to a flying school and prepare himself? He would need hundreds of dollars for this and besides would lose his wages at the plant while he was learning.

To the plant came one day Walter Hapworth, a young business man of great wealth who was an expert golfer and was in Bromville at the time taking part in a tournament.

He asked to be shown through the airplane plant and Ted Scott was assigned to take him around. Hapworth was amazed to find how much this young fellow, scarcely more than a boy, knew about planes. There was not a question Hapworth asked that Ted could not answer. In the course of the conversation Hapworth learned of Ted's ambition to be an aviator and, taking a strong liking to the boy, offered to give him money enough to defray his expenses at a flying school.

Ted Scott was amazed by the offer. He finally accepted on condition that it should be a loan. He went to an aviation school and in a short time he had mastered the art of flying and great things were predicted of him. He was evidently a born airman.

Ted got a position in the Government Air Mail Service, and he was assigned to the division operating between Chicago and St.

Louis. There he quickly gained distinction and became known as the most daring and expert airman on the route. Night and day, fog, rain, sleet, gale, and snow made no difference to him. Many a time he was in deadly danger, but his quick thinking and iron nerve brought him through unscathed.

About this time aviators and their backers were discussing an air non-stop journey from New York to Paris, a feat that had never before been attempted. A purse of twenty-five thousand dollars had been offered to the first one who should accomplish the journey. Many of the most noted aviators in the country, one of whom had crossed the North Pole in a plane, had enlisted for the contest. National interest was intense.

Ted Scott was keenly desirous of attempting the feat. But he had no plane of his own and thousands of dollars would be necessary for preparations. He happened to meet Walter Hapworth in St. Louis and the latter, learning of Ted's ambition, offered to provide the plane and all necessary funds.

Ted Scott jumped at the offer. He went to San Francisco to an airplane plant in which Hapworth had an interest and personally superintended the building of the plane, which he named the *Hapworth* after his friend and backer.

Rumors had come out from time to time that a young fellow named Scott, known to hardly any one except his mates in the Air Mail Service, was planning to enter the contest. The country shrugged its shoulders and laughed. Courageous of course, but foolish.

But Ted Scott stepped into the plane one afternoon and roared his way over the Rockies to St. Louis in a single jump in the fastest time that had ever been made by an airman traveling alone.

Then the country stopped laughing!

Scarcely waiting to take breath, Ted made another jump to the Atlantic coast, while hourly bulletins of his progress kept the country at fever heat. He had spanned the continent in two leaps!

His name was on every lip. He had blazed his way like a meteor to fame.

Then after a few days of preparation Ted jumped into the cockpit on one misty morning, lifted the *Hapworth* into the sky, and turned her nose toward Europe.

What dangers beset him on that perilous flight, how he swept along above the Atlantic's surges to swoop down at last like a lone eagle on Paris, winning the prize and fame, how America and all the world went mad over him, the stupendous welcome that awaited him on his return to his own country—all of this is told

in the first volume of this series, entitled: "Over the Ocean to Paris."

In the meantime Walter Hapworth had been made acquainted by Ted with Gale's scoundrelism in the matter of the property and had put the services of his own lawyers at Ted's disposal in order to secure justice for Eben Browning. Hapworth's suspicions had been aroused also, in regard to the golf course association in which he had a money interest and which Gale was managing. He followed the matter up, convicted Gale of crookedness and compelled restitution of his own money. He tried at the same time to force Gale to pay Eben what he owed him, but the rascal stubbornly refused to do this, relying on the absence of an essential witness who alone could clinch the case for Eben.

Gale had two sons, twins, Gregory and Duckworth, somewhat older than Ted. They were dissipated and worthless, and were bitter enemies of the young aviator.

Shortly after his return from his ocean flight Ted Scott enlisted in the aviation department of the Red Cross, working to succor the victims of a great flood along the Mississippi. Here he had many hairbreadth escapes and did work that awakened the nation's gratitude. While in Arkansas doing relief work he discovered the missing witness whose evidence

later compelled Gale to make full restitution to Eben.

Following his return from the flooded district, Ted turned again to the Air Mail Service, choosing the Rocky Mountain District because it was the most difficult and dangerous. On one occasion when his plane crashed he was lost in the wilderness and barely escaped with his life. Later on he won the great transpacific flight from San Francisco to Honolulu. He had the satisfaction, too, of clearing up the mystery that attached to his birth and vindicating the memory of his dead father, who had been falsely accused of murder.

Paul Monet, a warm friend of Ted's, had undertaken a flight with Tom Ralston to the West Indies in a search for hidden treasure. When no news came of him Ted and Hapworth set out in search of him. What dangers Ted Scott encountered in that perilous trip—the hurricane that nearly caused his death, his struggle with outlaws in the mountain fastnesses, his narrow escapes from sharks and devilfish, and his final triumph—are told in the preceding volume of this series, entitled: "The Search for the Lost Flyers."

Now to return to Ted Scott as he sped down the dark street in pursuit of the midnight prowlers who had robbed and, as far as he knew, killed his friend, Walter Hapworth.

The rascals were running like the wind, fear of capture lending wings to their feet. The taller one was slightly in advance, with the stocky one close on his heels. Ted was afraid they might separate, for in that case he would not know which one to pursue, for he did not know which one had the package that he was so desperately eager to regain.

But they kept together, straining every nerve, occasionally glancing over their shoulders at their pursuer.

At every moment Ted hoped to see the blue-coated form of a policeman come in sight and stop the fugitives. But the streets were absolutely deserted.

Ted's feet were bare and they were bruised sorely by gravel and stones. But he thought nothing of this at the time. All his energies were concentrated on catching his quarry and especially on recovering the papers.

The superb physical condition in which he always kept himself began to tell. Foot by foot he gained on the fugitives, especially on the smaller man, who was little by little falling behind his confederate.

A minute more and Ted had got within striking distance. He could hear the labored breathing of the shorter man. Just then the latter turned with a snarl, a knife gleaming in his hand.

Ted went into him like a catapult and sent him hurtling to the ground. As he fell the knife was knocked out of his hand, and Ted, almost as quick as light, recovered it.

As he turned toward the fellow he had knocked down a stone thrown by the man in front grazed his head. Had it hit him full, it would have knocked him out or perhaps killed him. As it was, the missile ridged his scalp and partly stunned him. He staggered up against a tree while the world swam dizzily about him.

He made a frantic effort to regain control of his reeling senses and after a minute or two succeeded. He looked around.

The men were gone. Even the sound of their footsteps had died away. They had vanished into the night.

Ted Scott groaned aloud.

Then suddenly he caught sight of a package on the sidewalk. He pounced upon it with a shout of triumph!

## CHAPTER III

### The Plotters Foiled

With eyes that were still dazed with the blow he had sustained, Ted Scott examined the package. As he studied it his exultation grew. It was the same package that he had seen Walter Hapworth handling the day before—the package containing the priceless papers.

Ted realized in a moment what had happened. The rascal into whom he had plunged had been half stunned by the impact and the subsequent fall. The package had been knocked out of his hand as he fell, together with the knife.

As the fellow had scrambled to his feet, groggy and bewildered, he had seen Ted advancing toward him knife in hand. Forgetting all about the package, he had fled for his life.

And now that Ted had recovered the papers his thoughts turned to his friend. What had happened to Walter? Ted had heard the sound of a terrific struggle in that darkened room. Perhaps Hapworth had been knifed by the desperadoes.

Anguished by the possibility, Ted Scott turned toward the hotel. As he did so he saw a figure in white running toward him. An instant later he recognized with infinite relief that it was the pajama-clad figure of Hapworth.

Ted rushed to meet his friend and fairly hugged him.

"Thanks be, Walter, that they didn't kill you!" Ted exclaimed. "I was scared stiff."

"Their will was good enough, but they didn't quite make it," returned Hapworth. "As it was, I got a crack from a blackjack that stretched me out. It must have been only a glancing blow, however, for I came to myself pretty soon and started out after you. I see the fellows got away."

"Yes," replied Ted. "I caught up with one of them and knocked him down, but just then a stone from the other one caught me on the side of my head and put me out of commission for a minute. When I got steady again they were gone."

"And my papers with them!" groaned Hapworth. "Ted, I wouldn't have lost them for ten thousand dollars."

"Hand over your ten thousand then," replied Ted, grinning, bringing his hand from behind his back. "Here are the papers."

Hapworth grabbed them with a cry of delight.

"Glory hallelujah!" he fairly shouted.

"Ted, I can't tell you what I owe you. So those fellows were stung after all."

"I guess we have the last laugh," chuckled Ted, with satisfaction.

"How did you get them? I should think they would have knifed you rather than give them up."

"The fellow who had them tried to. But the fall knocked the knife out of his hand. He dropped the papers, too, I suppose, and when I picked up the knife and ran toward him he thought of nothing but saving his skin."

They turned now toward the hotel, for the air was chill on their lightly clad forms. Nor did they care to be seen by any one in such scanty raiment.

But they were doomed not to return unobserved, for the noise of the struggle and Ted's banging on the door had awakened Eben and the servants, as well as some of the guests of the hotel.

All were agog with excitement and questions, which Ted and Hapworth answered briefly and with a good deal of caution, for they did not wish to have the fact spread abroad that it was Hapworth's papers the robbers were after. The matter passed for an ordinary attempt at theft that had not succeeded. As for the package Hapworth carried, he simply said that it held valuables and let it go at that.

Eben wished to send for a doctor, but both young men negatived the idea. The lump on Hapworth's head was not serious and a careful examination of Ted's wound showed that it was trifling. A careful washing and treatment with disinfectant was all that was necessary.

But this attempt might be followed by others, and now that he had a definite crime to base a charge upon Ted went to the telephone and called up the chief of police.

"That you, Dugan?" he said when he had the connection. "This is Ted Scott."

"Hello, Ted," came the answer. "What's on your mind?"

Ted briefly narrated the facts of the crime, giving as good a description as he had of the two men. The chief promised at once to watch the railroad station and to send word to surrounding towns to stop any men answering that description who might be attempting to get away by automobile.

The group in the office gradually dispersed and Ted and Hapworth went to the latter's room. That Hapworth had put up a terrific fight was shown by the upset and broken furniture in the room.

"A close call, Walter," remarked Ted, as he seated himself on the side of the latter's bed, after helping to right the confusion. "It's

lucky they only tried to blackjack you and didn't shove this between your ribs," and he indicated the knife he had captured from the smaller of the robbers.

"It is a murderous looking thing, isn't it?" replied Hapworth, as he took the weapon and examined it carefully. "Bet it's had blood on it more than once. Glad it isn't stained with any of mine."

The two friends conversed a little while longer and then Ted went to his own room and resumed the sleep that had been interrupted.

The next morning, Charity, who had slept through the fracas, was greatly wrought up over what had happened.

"To think that there can be such wicked men in the world!" she ejaculated. "And you say they look like Mexicans? If they do that to you here what will they do when you go down to where there's a nest of them?"

Ted laughed.

"You mustn't blame a whole nation for what their criminals do," he protested. "There are rascals in every country. Look at Greg and Duck Gale. They're Americans, but that didn't keep them from robbing and taking a chance on killing you and Eben."

Charity was silenced but not convinced, and her fears persisted concerning Ted's forthcoming journey.

Shortly after breakfast was over Hapworth received a telegram of considerable length. It was in code, and he took it to his room to work out the cipher. His face was grave when he rejoined Ted on the veranda of the hotel a little while later.

"No bad news, I hope," remarked Ted, as he noted the serious face of his friend.

"Bad enough," returned Hapworth. "My colleagues in the firm wire me that our competitors have taken possession of the property in question and are planning to dig wells there. It's a flimsy pretext on which they've acted, and, as I told you before, they're depending upon some grafting officials to back them up. Possession, you know, is nine points of the law in Mexico as well as here, and it will be a good deal harder to put them off than it would have been to keep them off, if my people had had any inkling of what they were planning to do. My fellow workers are very anxious that I should return at once."

"I'm mighty sorry it's happened that way," said Ted sympathetically. "However, when you once get there I'll bet on American grit and ingenuity to get the better of them."

"Oh, I haven't any doubt we'll win in the long run," replied Hapworth, as he set his lips grimly. "But this thing will make it a much harder and more expensive job. Another thing

is mentioned in the telegram. My people tell me that they've learned that Ramirez and Alvaron were hired by our competitors to trail me and get my papers by hook or by crook. They have been told to stop at nothing."

"Telegram came a little late," observed Ted. "We've already found that out, by ourselves."

"We surely have," agreed Hapworth dryly. "There's still another angle to the plot. Ramirez and Alvaron have been told to get the papers if possible while I'm still in America. But if this proves impossible, they're to warn their employers of the train I'm coming on and when the train gets into Mexican territory they'll arrange a holdup. Easy enough to do with the aid of some bandit gang. So my people urge me to come if possible by airplane."

"Your mind and theirs seem to have a good many ideas in common," laughed Ted, as he rose from his seat. "Come along with me now to the flying field, while I see to the storing of the supplies and fuel. I ordered last night everything that was necessary and I guess they'll be there by this time."

Hapworth agreed and the two young men set off down the street. They were stopped frequently by people who had read in the morning paper the details of the robbery and were anxious to congratulate Ted on his successful pursuit of the thieves and recovery of the loot.

The police station was on their route, and they stopped there for a few minutes to learn if anything had been found that would lead to the apprehension of the rascals. But the latter had vanished as though into thin air. Everything had been done that police routine suggested, but there was absolutely no clue as to their whereabouts.

The two friends reached the flying field and rolled the *Silver Streak* out of her hangar. She stood there gleaming in the sun, quivering as though she were eager to spread her wings and mount up into the skies.

"Does she look good or doesn't she?" asked Ted, as he patted the gallant plane proudly.

"The finest thing that ever flew," returned Hapworth. "What a good friend she's been to us, Ted! And what she could tell of, if she could talk! Her flight over the Pacific, over the West Indies! And now she's going to take us to Mexico and add to her experiences."

"May they be pleasant ones," said Ted. "I see the supplies are over there in the shed. Now let's get busy, for we've got to hurry if we get off to-day."

They set to work getting the food on board and refilling the tanks with oil. Hapworth could aid intelligently in this, for he was by this time an expert aviator and needed little advice. Ted left most of the storing of the

goods to him while he himself examined every strut and wire of the machine to make sure that everything was in perfect order.

The world had wondered at the freedom from accidents that had attended Ted Scott's numerous flights. His skill seemed proof against disaster. His nerve was indomitable. But in addition to wonderful skill and nerve he was supremely careful to see that his plane was always in good condition. So now he did not rest until he knew—not guessed but knew—that the machine was in perfect shape.

"Fit to fly for a man's life," he pronounced when he had finished his inspection. "We'll start at three o'clock this afternoon. Now let's get back to the hotel for dinner."

"Look who's coming," said Hapworth, nudging Ted as they reached the main street.

Ted looked and saw Brewster Gale approaching. Gale saw them at the same time, and his face became like a thundercloud.

## CHAPTER IV

### Off for Mexico

There was no love lost between Brewster Gale and the young men he was approaching. They despised him. He hated them.

He hated them for various reasons. Walter Hapworth had caught him in a crooked deal and compelled him to disgorge his ill-gotten gains. Too, Hapworth's backing of Ted Scott, the foster son of the man Gale had so deeply wronged, made his enmity the more bitter.

But he was still more venomous toward Ted. It was Ted Scott who had first given Hapworth an inkling of the double dealing that had resulted in Gale's exposure. It was Ted Scott who had found the missing witness down in Arkansas and had brought him back to compel Gale to make restitution to Eben Browning. It was Ted Scott who had captured Gale's two sons when they were fugitives from justice.

Those sons, Greg and Duck, were now serving terms in jail. Their pressing debts due to their dissipated habits had made them fall so

low as to attempt to rob Eben's safe. In the course of the theft they assailed both Eben and Charity with clubs and came near killing them. They had fled, and it was at Porto Rico that Ted, who at the time was making his flight over the West Indies, penetrated their disguises and handed them over to justice.

As the proprietor of the Hotel Excelsior came near, Hapworth nodded to him, but Gale froze him with an icy stare. But there was no suggestion of ice in the glare with which he favored Ted Scott. Rather there was burning, incandescent hate.

This, however, bothered Ted not at all, and he would have passed on indifferently, if Gale, as he came abreast of them, had not spat out an epithet that made Ted turn white to the lips.

He turned and planted himself in front of Gale, his eyes blazing.

"What was that you said?" he demanded.

"None of your business," growled Gale. "Get out of my way."

"Not much I won't," replied Ted. "I want you to take that back and do it at once."

A look of fear came into the shifty eyes of Gale.

"I was just talking to myself," he said. "You don't mean to say you can boss my thoughts, do you?"

"When those thoughts are spoken to me I can," replied Ted. "Quick now, take it back."

Gale raised the cane he was carrying. Quick as thought Ted snatched the stick and broke it over his knee.

"Clubs seem to be a habit with the Gale family," Ted remarked contemptuously, as he threw the pieces away. "Do I get that apology promptly?"

There was no mistaking the steel in his voice and the burly Gale was cowed.

"I take it back," he muttered.

Ted moved out of the way, and the discomfited Gale passed on, trembling in futile rage.

At the hotel they found that Charity had prepared a wonderful farewell meal for them.

"I want you to have good eatin' while you can," she said when they complimented her. "Goodness knows what kind of stuff you'll get to eat down in Mexico. I've heard about their tabasco an' their chili con carne an' other fiery stuff that fairly takes the linin' off your stomachs. I'm afraid you'll have dyspepsy somethin' awful when you get back."

"I guess not," laughed Ted. "Though many a time I'll be longing for your good cooking, Charity."

To divert her mind from the approaching separation the two young men carried on a sprightly conversation concerning the changes

that she and Eben were going to make in the hotel, for the worthy couple's fear of the sheriff had long since passed. Ted himself had made a fortune, and all of it was at their disposition, if they needed it. But it was a great salve to their pride that they had not had to avail themselves of Ted's money.

By reason of the restitution that Gale had been forced to make, Eben could now go forward in making the changes he had long desired in the old Bromville House. An entire new wing was to be added and the whole place was to be rejuvenated with new furniture.

The parting was hard when it came, as all Ted's partings from the old couple had been, for they regarded him as the apple of their eye. Eben's voice was husky and his eyes suspiciously moist as he said good-by and Charity wept openly. Ted patted and soothed her with promises of a quick return, but there was an ache in his own heart as he left those who loved him so dearly.

He and Hapworth had made half the distance to the flying field when the latter, chancing to look back, stopped short with a startled exclamation.

"What is it?" asked Ted.

"That tall Mexican, Ramirez!" exclaimed Hapworth. "I was sure that I caught a glimpse

of him dodging around the corner. I'll bet he's been trailing us."

"We'll soon see," declared Ted, as he broke into a run toward the corner in question, followed closely by Hapworth.

But when they reached the corner there was no one to be seen. They followed the side street for some distance but Ramirez—if it had been that miscreant—had vanished as completely as though the earth had swallowed the man up!

"Guess you think I must have been dreaming," said Hapworth rather sheepishly, as they retraced their steps, "but I'd wager a lot that it was Ramirez and no other."

"The rascals seem to be tenacious, right enough," replied Ted, "but I guess they've reached the end of the rope as far as their ability to do mischief is concerned. An hour from now we'll be up in the air and can laugh at their plots."

When they reached the flying field they found several of Ted's old comrades at the airplane plant gathered about the *Silver Streak.* The preparations that had been made for the flight had aroused their interest and curiosity.

"Getting ready to take wing again, Ted?" asked Mark Lawson, as he shook hands with his friend.

"Yes, I'm off for a little trip," replied Ted. "But I'll be back before long."

"Didn't know but what you were planning to go to Tokio, considering the amount of fuel you have in your tanks," put in Breck Lewis.

"I figure it's a hunting excursion," remarked Jack Forrest. "Look at the guns and revolvers in the plane."

"You boys are bad guessers," said Ted, with a grin. "I'll tell you how far off the mark you've been when I get back. Just now I'm keeping my destination under my hat. Lend a hand, will you, fellows, and help me get the machine pointed with its nose to the north?"

Hapworth shot a surprised glance at him, but Ted pretended not to see it.

"North, is it?" remarked Mark, as he helped wheel the plane into the required position.

"To Greenland's icy mountains," put in Breck.

"Or maybe as far up as the Pole," added Jack.

Ted grinned but said nothing. He donned his helmet and Hapworth followed his example.

"You old bluffer," Hapworth murmured in a low voice.

"What they don't know won't hurt them," observed Ted. "I want to keep our destination to ourselves as long as possible."

They climbed in and Ted started the engine

roaring. Mark Lawson and Jack Forrest knocked the blocks away from in front of the machine and the plane started down the runway with increasing speed.

Her fuel load was heavy, and Ted let her go a full two hundred yards to gather momentum before he lifted her from the ground. The *Silver Streak* obeyed his touch as a horse answers to the bit and soared into the skies like a bird, while the voices of those below rose in a clamorous good-by.

Swift as an arrow, the *Silver Streak* headed toward the north until she became a mere dot on the horizon and finally vanished altogether from the straining eyes of the group on the flying field.

When he knew that he had become invisible to the watchers, Ted described a wide circle and then aimed directly south. He felt convinced that for the time being at least he had shrouded his aims in secrecy.

How long that secrecy could be maintained he did not know. He was a national figure, and his movements were watched with as keen an interest as those of the President of the United States. He knew that Mark Lawson and his other friends would be voluble about his departure and that the next day the news would be flashed all over the country that Ted Scott was flying north in a plane equipped for a long

trip. Then conjecture would be busy every moment as to where he was going and why.

Of course his plane, as well as himself, was famous, and airmen everywhere would know it instantly as the *Silver Streak.* But he intended to fly high and he hoped that the markings would not be distinguished. Then, too, it would be night before long, and by the time the next morning dawned he would probably be south of the Rio Grande.

He had two reasons for desiring secrecy. The first and more important was because of the danger that threatened Mr. Hapworth and his precious documents. To be sure, there seemed to be little danger to be apprehended while they were in the air. Still, a shot from beneath might cripple the plane, and in accordance with his habitual caution he wanted to take no chances.

The second reason was his desire to avoid a public and official reception when he should arrive at Mexico City. If it were known that he was coming, there would be thousands to greet him. Then there would be the mauling and pounding by the crowds, the formal dinners and receptions, the parades through the streets while the people showered his car with flowers, the thousand things that were the penalty of such fame as his. He was thor-

oughly tired of publicity. For once, at least, he wanted to belong to himself.

But he soon forgot everything except that he was again in the air. That was his supreme delight, to be soaring through the skies in the clean, sun-drenched air, freed from all the sordid fetters of earth that shackled his body and his soul. The air was his element. There he asked no odds of the eagle to which he had so often been compared.

For the first hour of the flight everything worked to a charm. The visibility was fine, and hill and valley, plain and stream, lay beneath him as clear-cut as a cameo. It was ideal flying weather. What little wind there was came from behind him and accelerated still further the speed of the plane, which was making well over a hundred miles an hour.

Ted's plan had been to make for the Mississippi and follow the course of the Father of Waters until it emptied into the Gulf. Then he would lay his course directly over that surging waste of waters to the Mexican capital.

But before he reached the great river a light haze began to form and thickened steadily until the ground below was blotted out. At first the haze was white and the *Silver Streak* seemed to be floating along over great rolls of cotton wool.

With both sun and ground invisible, Ted was forced to rely on his instruments. They were trusted friends and had never failed him, especially the earth inductor compass, which on the occasion of his transatlantic flight had enabled him to hit the Irish coast within three miles of his goal, a feat that had never been equaled in the history of air navigation.

The haze became dark in color and thickened into fog, and fog was the most terrible enemy of the airman. There were no instruments that could tell him of the possible approach of another plane. There was a chance at any moment of a black bulk looming up out of the fog coming directly toward him. A crash—and two planes like wounded birds would go whirling down to the ground.

But this was a danger that had to be faced, and Ted Scott thrust it resolutely into the back of his mind.

A note came through the tube from Hapworth. They had to rely on this means of communication while flying, for the deafening roar of the motor made conversation practically impossible.

The note read:

"I'm hungry. How about you? Shall I pass you some food?"

Ted scribbled back:

"Send it along."

A couple of sandwiches were handed to him a moment later and a thermos bottle containing coffee. Ted ate and drank and felt refreshed.

A glance at his clock told him that the darkness of night had been added to the gloom of the fog. He hoped that if he could rise high enough he might be able to take observations of the moon and stars and thus check up on his instruments.

He wrote a brief note:

"Am going higher. Get your instruments ready to take observations."

He pulled the stick and the *Silver Streak* shot upward.

Up and up it went until at last the fog began to shred out and finally disappeared.

But the flyers were doomed to disappointment as far as observations were concerned, for though they had surmounted the fog, the skies above were as black as ink. Not a star showed and the moon had veiled her face. It was evident that a storm was brewing.

Thunder muttered on the horizon, growing ever more truculent. Rain was beginning to fall. Flashes of lightning tore through the clouds. The wind was coming in sudden gusts that became more and more frequent.

The captain of a ship at sea would at once have furled his sails and made things snug.

But there was no taking in of sails on the ship of the sky. That had to take things as they came and weather the storm as best it might.

Nor in that fog was there any possibility of landing safely, even if a suitable place for that purpose had been near at hand. Soon the rain was coming down in torrents. It beat against the window of the cockpit as though it would dash it in. The thunder deeped into a continuous cannonade, while the lightning enveloped the plane with an uncanny, ghastly light. Ted fervently hoped that none of the numerous bolts would strike the plane. Once a ridge of flickering flame ran along the motor and his heart beat faster. But it was unaccompanied by shock and the plane still hurled itself uninjured through the black gulf of the night.

Then came a terrific blast of wind. It caught the *Silver Streak* at such an angle that it turned the plane completely upside down!

## CHAPTER V

### In the Grip of the Storm

Only the strength of the straps that belted him in kept Ted Scott from being hurled from his seat when the *Silver Streak* turned turtle.

Would he ever be able to right it in the teeth of that gale that kept tossing the overturned plane up and down as though it were a chip in the grip of Niagara?

A lesser pilot might have lost his head completely. But Ted Scott was ever at his best when the stress and strain were greatest, and he fought indomitably, using all his cunning and craftsmanship to get the better of his enemy.

Gradually he brought the plane to an even keel or as nearly so as was possible in that battle with the gale. He jockeyed it as a skillful rider manages a refractory steed, turning, evading, dodging, trying to keep the wind in the back or on the quarter. This was made the more difficult from the fact that at times the wind seemed to be coming from all directions

at once. It was a perfect maelstrom, whirling the plane about until its occupant's head grew dizzy.

But through the welter and the tumult Ted Scott kept his head and his nerve—that head and nerve that had carried him through so many perils unscathed. It was useless to try to keep to his course. All his energies were bent to handling his craft so as to keep the wind directly abaft.

For hours the tempest kept up. Then it gradually began to abate its fury. The lightning flashes grew less frequent, the torrents subsided to a drizzle, and the thunder grew fainter and fainter and finally died away.

It had been a long and terrific battle, and when Ted knew that he had won it he found himself drenched with perspiration and as limp as a rag. But his heart was filled with thankfulness and exultation. Once more Death had glared at him out of the storm but had passed him by.

He studied his instruments and figured that he had been carried about a hundred miles out of his course. This was regrettable, but not a matter of serious moment. The *Silver Streak,* with its phenomenal speed, could make up the loss in less than an hour.

The clouds were shredding away and through

the rifts stars peeped out. The moon came into sight, and soon the scene was bathed in beauty.

Ted sent a message through the tube:

"You can take your observations now," it read, "and then it might be a good idea to see if anything back there has been injured or strained by the gale. It was a terror while it lasted."

Hapworth did as directed, found that no damage had been done, and recorded the figures of his observations. Ted compared them with his own calculations and found that they harmonized. Then, with a sigh of relief, he settled back in his seat, his hands on the controls and a sense of rest and well-being pervading his whole body.

Had Charity been praying for him? he wondered. He was certain that she had. How constantly she thought of him! What a mother she had been to him!

His thoughts reverted to his own mother, who had died soon after his birth and of whom he remembered absolutely nothing. And of his father, who had died under a cloud before his innocence had been established.

How he wished that his father and his mother, Alice, had lived—were living now to rejoice in the fame and honors that had been

showered on their son. Perhaps, he thought, their spirits did know all about it and were proud and fond of him.

He roused himself from his reveries, for his quick eyes had detected something below him that looked like water. Was it possible that he had so soon reached the Gulf of Mexico? He looked at his clock and did some quick calculations. Yes, it might well be that he had got so far on his journey.

He pushed the joystick and the plane shot downward. The fog had vanished now and the moonlight, shimmering on the scene below, showed him the froth and spume of huge breakers beating upon the coast, which at this place was rocky and precipitous.

The storm from whose fury he had so narrowly escaped had evidently been as fierce on the water as on the land, for the waves were running mountain high. An ill night, Ted thought, for any hapless ship to find itself off that inhospitable coast.

Even as this came to his mind a note came through the tube from Hapworth.

"Look down the coast a little to the left," the note read. "Seems to me there's something there that looks like a ship."

Ted gazed in the direction indicated and could see some dark object that was certainly

not a part of the shore. He snatched up his night glasses and looked through them.

Sure enough, there was something that looked like a big schooner going to pieces on the rocks. He could see a welter of masts and ropes on the littered decks. And even as he looked the vessel broke in two and the severed sections floated apart.

Instantly Ted turned the nose of the *Silver Streak* in that direction. Then he scribbled a note to Hapworth:

"You were right. Stand by with ropes. Send out a flare to tell them that we are coming."

Hapworth did as directed and a few minutes later Ted found himself directly above the wreck.

Only one mast was left standing and that swayed to and fro, threatening to fall at any minute.

Hapworth let down another flare that for a moment made the scene as bright as midday. In that transient illumination Ted saw that the deck seemed to have been swept clear of all human forms. The ravening sea had taken its toll of officers and crew.

Then, as he looked more closely, he descried a figure clinging to the mast near the top. The man had evidently seen the plane, for he waved

one arm wildly at it with the energy of despair.

Hapworth also had seen the forlorn form, for he was already letting down a rope. At the lower end he had fashioned a noose while the upper part was firmly attached to a bar in the fuselage.

Ted swept around in small spirals, letting the plane down so that it was hovering as near the top of the mast as he dared go. Neither Ted nor Hapworth had forgotten the rescue they had made while flying across the Pacific to Honolulu. Could they do the trick again?

The rope swept to and fro as close as Hapworth could get it to the man on the mast. Twice the man made a grab at it, only to miss.

A third time the rope swayed toward him, but just then with a terrific groaning and splintering the mast gave way and fell with its burden into the raging waters.

Ted's heart was stabbed with anguish. It was awful to see a human being die when help had seemed so near.

Another flare was dropped and from the mass of tangled wood and ropes Ted saw the figure of the man emerge. He was swimming feebly, and seemed to have been hurt by the fall into the water.

The toppling of the mast had made it possible for Ted to let the plane down until it was hovering not more than twenty feet above the

surface, so close indeed that spray from the billows came into the fuselage.

Now again the rope dangled almost within reach of the man's fingers, but each time he tried to grasp it a wave would sweep him out of reach. All that time he was growing weaker from the terrible buffeting of the billows.

But at last a lucky lunge enabled him to grasp the rope. He held it with the clutch of a drowning man.

Hapworth made frantic gestures to indicate that the man should get his arms through the noose so that it could settle beneath them. At first he seemed too dazed to understand. Then he grasped the meaning of the signs and slowly and with infinite difficulty got his arms through. The noose tightened about his body.

Then his head drooped. The strain and stress had been too much for him. He had fainted.

## CHAPTER VI

### Winging through the Air

Ted Scott's heart skipped a beat as the thought came to him that the man he and Walter Hapworth were trying to rescue might be dead. Had he come to his aid just a moment too late?

Hapworth hoisted the man, winding the rope around the bar as he drew it in, and in a minute or two had brought the swaying figure up to the fuselage. Then Ted helped him with one hand, while with the other he maintained control of the plane.

The man was laid down in the fuselage and a hasty examination by Hapworth showed that the heart was still beating. Then the latter set to work with restoratives while Ted Scott shot the *Silver Streak* up to a height of five hundred feet and again turned it in its course for the Mexican capital.

He was exultant in the thought that he had saved one man at least from death, but his heart was sad as he thought of the others that had

been swept to destruction. How many wives and children would look in vain for them!

Hapworth's energetic and skillful treatment soon brought the man back to consciousness. He was very weak, and Hapworth motioned him not to try to talk until he was stronger.

The man, whose general appearance proclaimed him a Mexican, was of middle height and strongly built. His face was frank and pleasant, and his eyes had the look of one who was familiar with the open spaces. They were full of gratitude as they turned from the face of one rescuer to that of the other.

When he seemed to have fully recovered he manifested a desire to speak. Mr. Hapworth bent over close to him and by speaking loudly they could make themselves understood, despite the noise of the motor.

Hapworth jotted down on paper the main points of the dialogue, and a little later sent a note through the tube to Ted. The latter took it and read:

"He says his name is Juan Bapo and he lives in Mexico City. Speaks English fairly well. He is an aviator by profession." Here Ted indulged in an exclamation of surprise and pleasure. "He has had a good deal of experience in flying. Had been up to New Orleans and had embarked for Mexico on the schooner that was wrecked, the *Maria Xantro*. Seems to be a fine

fellow. He is intensely grateful. Has a wife and ten children, so that we have made a dozen people happy."

Ted wrote back:

"Good! Glad we came just in the nick of time. We'll get him to Mexico City sooner than he had expected. It's bully that we were able to help a brother aviator. Get him to tell you all about the landing field in Mexico City —draw a rough map, if he will. We need all the information we can get. Another thing. These maps I have here of Mexico have a good many inaccuracies in them. See if he can help get them straight."

The rescued man was delighted to find that he could be of some service to his benefactors and bent eagerly over the maps, making many changes that afterward stood Ted Scott in good stead. The field at Mexico City, he said, was a fine one, more than a mile square. But the city was eight thousand feet above sea level and that had to be taken into account in taking off or landing. On account of the rarefied air at that height the plane would have to run much farther along the ground before it could be lifted into the air. Other local hints were added as to the wind currents that proved later of inestimable service.

All through the night the *Silver Streak*

zoomed through the upper reaches. The night seemed exceptionally long to Ted.

Behind him Walter Hapworth and Juan Bapo were dozing. Ted himself would have liked to indulge himself in a brief nap, but never for a moment did his eyelids falter. His many flights had inured him against the necessity for sleep until his work was done.

Slowly the stars faded out of the sky and a rosy dawn came up out of the east. Ted cast a glance below him. The plane was still over the water, and the aviator noted that the waves had subsided to a great extent and now rolled in long, graceful swells. But Ted knew that they would soon reach land. They had already passed far south of where the Rio Grande flows into the Gulf.

The young aviator anticipated rather difficult flying, for much of the time the *Silver Streak* would be over the mountains, and the treacherous air currents of the gorges would demand unceasing vigilance, if he were to reach his destination in safety.

About two hours after sunrise Ted Scott saw land beneath him. It was an agreeable change from the dreary waste of water, and Ted welcomed it with enthusiasm.

The day was clear and beautiful and everything below stood out in clear relief beneath

the brilliant rays of the sun. The scenery was very different from that in the United States. Even without his maps or his instruments Ted would have known in an instant that he was flying over a foreign country.

There were immense plains studded with cacti, deserts on which nothing else but cacti would grow. Then again he would come to blossoming stretches rich with flowers and fruits. A little later would come in sight ranges of mountains, through the passes of which could be descried like so many toiling ants a long line of mules and peons moving with the slowness that is characteristic of almost everything Mexican. It seemed like a land of dreams divorced from the mighty energy of the rest of the North American continent.

At times cities would come in sight, with the adjoining country studded with derricks that betrayed the presence of oil, that chief commercial product of Mexico. But these were exceptional. The great majority of inhabited places were small villages with streets sprawling and uneven, with huts small and dilapidated, with men and dogs drowsing in the sunshine.

But however sleepy the places looked, they broke at once into shrill and active life as soon as the *Silver Streak* was discovered flying over-

head. The sight of a plane was far more uncommon there than in the countries farther north. People came rushing from their doors shouting and screaming and pointing toward the sky and its lonely voyager. Many of them crossed themselves and prayed that the visitant should bring them no ill.

On some such occasions Ted, through sheer exuberance of spirits, indulged in a series of stunts that sent the crowd below into wild spasms of excitement, with fear and delight almost equally mingled. Then he would right the plane and with a farewell wave of his hand resume his journey.

Juan Bapo, the rescued man, was astounded at Ted's marvelous skill and craftsmanship. He had never seen such artistry in his life.

The result of his agitation was told in a note to Ted that Hapworth shoved through the tube:

"Bapo is all worked up about you, Ted. He asked me who you were, and when I told him that you were the Ted Scott who had flown over the Atlantic and the Pacific I thought he'd have a fit. I think he's glad he was shipwrecked now, just so that the great Ted Scott could rescue him. He'll have something to talk about all the rest of his life. He's wildly enthusiastic over you. Asked me if he thought you would permit him to shake your hand."

Ted grinned and scribbled back:

"Sure thing. Tell him so."

The next moment Bapo's bronzed hand reached gently over the back of Ted's seat and Ted shook it warmly, turning with a smile to the man as he did so. That smile made Juan Bapo Ted Scott's ardent admirer and follower for life.

Noon came and passed. Now Ted's clock and instruments told him that with luck he could count on reaching the Mexican capital in about two hours.

How good it would be just to glide down over the mountains, find the flying field practically deserted except for a few mechanics and pilots, make his landing, quietly step out of the plane, give it into the keeping of some of the field attendants, and then stroll off with Mr. Hapworth to a good hotel, have dinner, bath, and then to bed for the long night's rest that he so sorely needed! The delight, the immeasurable delight of being simply a private individual!

For nearly a year this had been denied him. Wherever he went his coming had been heralded and his fame preceded him. Always enormous crowds had gathered to meet him, to feast their eyes upon the world's idol. He had heard salvos of applause until his ears had been deafened. He had lived perpetually in the limelight.

Not but what this had had its compensa-

tions. He was young and just as human as anybody else and could not fail to be proud and stirred by the brilliance of his fame. But just as a king would at times like to be a cottager so he longed intensely for a bit of privacy and quiet.

This time he believed that he was not to be disappointed. He chuckled to himself as he thought how he had outwitted the public and the ubiquitous reporters.

A thin shred of smoke coming from a mountain peak a great way ahead of him attracted his attention. He turned in his seat and pointed it out to Mr. Hapworth.

A moment later a scribbled line came through the tube:

"Bapo says it is Mount Popocatapetl."

Popocatapetl! The famous volcano, whose name, Ted remembered with a feeling of amusement, he had always found hard to spell at school, the most celebrated mountain in Mexico, rising to a height of almost eighteen thousand feet.

But if that were Popocatapetl, they must be nearer their destination than he had thought, for he knew that its towering peak overlooked the Mexican capital.

He shot up in the air. As he ascended he became aware of several tiny specks coming toward him that, as they drew nearer, resolved

themselves into airplanes. Two, three, half a dozen! He noted that they were flying in military formation.

"Stung!" Ted muttered to himself. "They're an official escort. They've heard of my coming and flown out to meet me."

That Ted was right was proved by the tactics of the airplanes as they came nearer. By skillful convolutions they spread about him in the shape of a horizontal triangle, of which he was the apex, thus according him the place of honor.

As the *Silver Streak* was by far the fastest of the aircraft, Ted was compelled in courtesy to lessen speed so as to keep in correct formation.

He was chagrined at the upsetting of his plan to reach the capital unrecognized. How had they known that he was coming?

## CHAPTER VII

### A Clever Stratagem

Ted Scott would have been less puzzled as to how his coming to Mexico City had been heralded had he known that early that morning a report had come in from an air field over which he had passed that a plane with the markings of the famous *Silver Streak* had been seen flying in the direction of the capital of Mexico.

There was scurrying in hot haste to prepare an official reception. A committee was organized to arrange for fêtes and banquets. Military organizations were called out in readiness for parade. The leading bands of the capital were ordered to repair to the flying field.

The United States Embassy also was profoundly stirred by the news and prepared to give a formal greeting to their famous young countryman.

The general public shared in the excitement. Business was practically suspended and the streets were black with people, the humblest as well as the more important, all making their

way to the flying field. It was a gala day in the Mexican capital. Were they not to see in actual flesh and blood the gallant young aviator who had stirred the imagination of the world?

When at last the *Silver Streak* was seen heading the escort of military planes a roar of welcome went up that could have been heard for miles. The populace were clamorous with enthusiasm. The dignified officials forgot their dignity and cheered and shouted with the rest.

When the aerial squadron reached the flying field the escorting planes fell away, leaving the *Silver Streak* the dominating figure of the scene.

In long, sweeping spirals, Ted Scott brought the plane lower, his keen eyes seeking for a landing place. A cordon of police had cleared a space that extended in a narrow strip the whole length of the field.

Ted noted the stand that from its profusion of flags indicated the official box of the President. He brought the *Silver Streak* around at the farther end of the field and then brought it down in a beautiful landing facing the President's box and but a few yards distant.

Instantly there was a wild rush from all parts of the field that threatened to swamp the plane and its occupants. The police did their best to keep off the mob, but they were swept

away like straws. In a moment the *Silver* Streak and its occupants were the center of a tumultuous, milling crowd that swirled around it like the waves of the sea.

Smilingly, Ted Scott unstrapped the belt that held him and stood up in the plane. At the same moment Mr. Hapworth touched him on the shoulder and handed him a package of papers. Ted looked at it a moment, nodded to Hapworth, and then tucked the package carefully away in the breast pocket of his coat.

The shouts of the crowd redoubled as they saw his figure stretched to its full height. Ted smiled at them, waved his hand, and bowed in recognition of the cheers.

In the meantime a band of cavalry had reinforced the police and formed a lane in the throng through which hurried the American Ambassador and his staff, who shook hands with Ted as he stepped down from the plane and overwhelmed him with congratulations. Then they bore him with them through the crowd toward the President's box, where that dignitary, with gold-laced aides and attendants, stood to give him official welcome to the capital of Mexico.

A thousand hands were reached out to touch and pat him as Ted was hurried along, and in the tumult he felt his coat wrenched open, while rough and eager hands tore the package

which Walter Hapworth had just given him from its resting place. Who had done it, he did not know. He did know, though, that the package was gone!

Whoever had done it had melted into the mob and there was no possibility of identifying him. In the tumult, no one had seemed to notice the theft, or, if any one had, had thought it was simply an affectionate impulse to touch the man who was the center of all this idolatry.

Ted gave no sign that he knew of his loss. His face was impassible, his bearing strangely unperturbed. If he felt any wrath at the loss, he showed no trace of it as he listened to the greetings of the tall, dignified head of the Mexican Republic.

Sheltered from the crowds in the sanctum of the official box, he held an informal reception and was told of the plans that had been made in his honor.

Ted listened, perplexed. His trip had been a purely personal one, and he shrank from the long program of fêtes and banquets that had been prepared for him. He conferred with the American Ambassador and explained the situation.

"I appreciate your feeling," the Ambassador said, "and I will do everything possible to meet your views. But, at the same time, my

dear fellow, you must remember that you are a national figure. You are one of the best assets that the United States has ever had in promoting goodwill among the nations. You are her unofficial ambassador and your influence has done much for your country.

"For years our relations with Mexico have been strained. More than once the two countries have been on the verge of war. Things are better now, but there is yet much to do. The oil question, the land question, the agrarian question are pressing for solution. You've come just in time to help me, and in helping me you are helping our country. Mexico is a sensitive nation. Other countries have given you great ovations. Mexico wants to do the same. If you slight it, the people will think that it is because of indifference or contempt. That would hamper my negotiations. On the other hand, if you fall in with their plans, the Mexicans will be carried away with enthusiasm for you and I shall come in for a share of the popularity and my work will be made easier. Do you see?"

Ted Scott's response was instant. He loved his country with all his heart. Not for a moment would he let his personal wishes stand in the way of helping her.

"Count on me," he said warmly. "I'm en-

tirely in your hands and those of the official committee. Whatever you wish will be all right."

"Good!" exclaimed the Ambassador. "I might have been sure that Ted Scott wouldn't give me any other answer. On my part, I'll do all I can to abridge the program without giving offense. I appreciate the fact that you need sleep after your long journey, and I'll try to postpone most of the festivities till tomorrow. Of course I want you to be my guest while you're in the capital. I'll confer now with the committee of arrangements."

The result of the conference was that on that evening Ted Scott was to be the guest of honor at a banquet in the President's palace. This was, however, to break up early, in order to let the young aviator get the long sleep he needed. He would spend that night at the hotel that he and Mr. Hapworth had decided upon, but the next day he was to take up his quarters at the United States Embassy. There would be a parade, visits to the Mexican Congress, and other official functions.

The banquet that evening was a grand affair. The meal was sumptuous and the guests included the most important officials and the wittiest and most beautiful women of the Mexican capital. The President made a speech lauding his distinguished visitor and the young

aviator responded in a few graceful, modest words that confirmed the high opinion held of him. At a reasonably early hour, as had been agreed upon, Ted was driven, with a squad of cavalry as escort, to the hotel, which Mr. Hapworth had reached before him.

It was an enormous relief for Ted to find himself at ease with his friend in his pleasant suite at the hotel.

"The penalty of fame," observed Walter Hapworth, as Ted stretched himself out in an easy chair. "I suppose you're worn to a frazzle."

"Just about," replied Ted. "Bed will sure look good to me. How about you?"

"Tired, of course, but nothing wrong. You have my package of valuable papers, of course," went on Hapworth.

"No," grinned Ted. "They were stolen in the crush."

Hapworth did not wince. Instead, he burst into a roar of laughter.

"Sold!" he shouted. "I wonder what the rascals thought when they opened the package and found only scraps of waste paper!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### The Mountain Rebel

"I have to hand it to you, Ted," stated Walter Hapworth, when he had recovered from his laughter. "That was a dandy idea of yours to have me hand that package to you in full view of the crowd. Those crooks who were on the watch fell for it. They had eyes only for you and paid no attention to me. And now the real papers are safe in the office of the firm. I made tracks for that just as soon as I could get clear of the crowd. Did you get sight of the rascals?"

"No," replied Ted Scott. "I only felt hands fumbling at my pocket, but in the crowd I couldn't tell whom those hands belonged to. I just let them work."

"It couldn't of course have been Ramirez and Alvaron," mused Hapworth. "They couldn't possibly have got here before us, even if they came in another plane."

"No," agreed Ted. "But that simply shows that your enemies have a number of crooks at their disposal. It may be a regular, organ-

ized gang. You've got to keep your eyes open. They'll be more desperate than ever when they see how we fooled them with that package."

"I'd like to have seen their faces," chuckled Hapworth.

"We may see them sooner than we want," warned Ted Scott seriously. "Keep on the watch, Walter. By the way, what did you learn from your firm as to the way things were going?"

Hapworth's face became sober.

"Things are not good," he confessed. "Our competitors seem to have gotten a strangle hold on our property for the present. Have a big force of men busy on it. The papers I've brought with me will clear up the situation, I hope. If it weren't for some grafting officials that are in league with them, the task would be simpler. You've been an enormous help to me in bringing me down here, Ted," Hapworth went on thoughtfully, "and I have a feeling that this big ovation they're giving you may help me out some more. The fact that you're a warm friend of mine and that I made the trip with you will give me and my firm a kind of prestige that may get us a fair show in the courts. Crooked officials won't dare to go so far, perhaps, against a friend of Ted Scott's as they otherwise might be inclined to do."

"I hope it may be as you say," returned Ted warmly. "You've done an awful lot for me, Walter, and I'll be only too glad to pay part of my debt. Just count on me in any way possible."

The next day was a notable one in the annals of Mexico City. The parade wound its way through all the principal streets between throngs of spectators packed from walls to curb. It seemed as though the whole population had turned out to do honor to the young aviator. In addition, there were hosts of visitors who had poured in from surrounding towns to see the man of whom all the world was talking. Flowers fell from the roofs of the buildings until Ted's car was heaped with them, and the air was rent with huzzas the whole length of the route.

Then followed a dinner, given by the municipality, in which the young aviator was lauded to the skies. In the afternoon he visited the congress, all the members of which rose to their feet when Ted entered and crowded around him for the privilege of shaking hands. In the evening he held a reception at the United States Embassy, at which practically every American of note residing in the capital was present.

Other splendid functions followed on the next day and then, the official ceremonies being

over, the young aviator at last had an opportunity of relaxing and drawing a free breath.

He had taken up his quarters at the United States Embassy where every attention was showered upon him. The Ambassador had liked him from the first because of the sincerity and simplicity of his character. Amid all the applause that surrounded him, Ted Scott moved utterly unspoiled. None could resist this winning characteristic.

"I wonder, Ted," said the Ambassador, when they had an opportunity for a chat on the third afternoon of his stay, "whether you will do me a favor?"

"Wonder no longer," replied Ted, with a smile. "Consider it done, whatever it is. Let's have it."

"Thanks," replied the Ambassador. "Are you in a great hurry to get back to the United States?"

"Not especially," replied Ted, wondering what was coming next. "Of course, there's no place like home, and I had thought to stay here only two or three days. But there's nothing pressing just now to draw me back and my time is at your disposal."

"That's fine!" exclaimed his host, much gratified. "Well, the matter is this. There's a young Mexican here in his Government's service who stands very high in the esteem of the

authorities. He is a very able fellow and has the promise of a great career. His name is Valdez, Alfredo Valdez, one of the Mexican Under Secretaries of State."

"I think I remember meeting him at the President's reception," observed Ted.

"No doubt you did. Now, Valdez has discovered that he's made a very serious mistake. It was just a matter of inadvertence that might have happened to any one. But it may have very serious consequences, just the same, and totally ruin his official career."

"That's too bad," murmured Ted sympathetically.

"It is," agreed the Ambassador, "and I want to help him remedy it if possible. Here is the situation. A serious rebellion is threatening in one of the distant provinces of Mexico, far beyond the mountains. The leader of it is a man named Manuel Copenez. He is a man of great influence in the province, a good soldier, and has a large military following. He is fiery, irascible, but, take him all in all, not a bad fellow. If a revolt did start up there, it would be a very disagreeable thing for the Government. They would probably be able to subdue it in the long run, but only after a considerable expenditure of lives and money. Then, too, if one province starts, others may join it. There's a lot of loose tinder in Mexico

that only needs a match to start a conflagration."

"Can't the Government come to terms with him?" asked Ted.

"They want to and they've tried to," replied the Ambassador. "The grievances of Copenez are largely imaginary ones, due to misapprehension of the Government's attitude. The Government has written to him, offering to give him all that he wants and more."

"I should think that would settle it," remarked Ted, a bit puzzled.

"It probably would have," replied the Ambassador, "if Copenez had ever received the message."

"What's that?" asked Ted, in surprise.

"That's where Valdez comes in," explained his host. "He was entrusted with the framing and sending of the letter. But he was dispatching other documents at the same time and there was a confusion of envelopes. The Copenez letter would have gone to an entirely different person, but was fortunately recovered just in time. But Copenez himself will receive a letter that will mean to him nothing and perhaps increase his irritation."

"Can't it be remedied?" asked Ted. "How about using the telegraph?"

"It doesn't reach into that remote province," replied the Ambassador. "There are

not even railroads. The only mode of travel is by mule back through the mountains. It would be a week or two, possibly more, before Copenez could be communicated with. In the meantime, the fat may be in the fire. Let the first shot ring out, and the revolution is on, and no one knows when the trouble may end."

"Hard luck!" muttered Ted.

"Valdez is perfectly frantic about it, not only for his country's sake, but his own," went on the Ambassador. "If it gets out that he has made such a blunder, it will ruin his career. His enemies will clamor for his dismissal and the Government will be forced to disavow him."

"Poor fellow!" observed Ted.

"You may wonder," continued the Ambassador, "why I am so greatly interested in all this. In the first place, it's greatly to the advantage of the United States that Mexico should remain at peace within itself, not be disturbed by revolutions within its borders. Only with a peaceful and prosperous Mexico can our country carry on fruitful negotiations.

"In the second place, it's greatly to my interest and our country's interest that Valdez should maintain his prestige and standing in the Government. He and I are on the best possible terms, and I have found him very broad-minded and intelligent in discussing the

questions at issue between the two governments. If he were displaced and succeeded by somebody else, I might find his successor much more difficult to deal with."

"How did you come to know about this error?" asked Ted.

"Valdez confided in me," avowed the Ambassador, drawing his chair closer and looking around to make sure that no one was within hearing. "He and I are the only living beings who know about this thing besides yourself. He wants to correct his error and keep others from knowing anything about it. He sees only one possible way of doing it. That way has occurred to him since you came flying into Mexico City."

The Ambassador paused, coughed, and looked at Ted significantly.

Ted Scott grasped the situation instantly.

"I see," he said. "Valdez wants me to fly over those mountains again with a message to Copenez."

"Exactly!" replied the Ambassador. "Of course I know and he knows that it's asking a great deal of you. It's rough country and dangerous for flying and there are plenty of bandits in that remote and unsettled region. If anything went wrong with your machine, you might be in grave difficulty. You may ask why he doesn't send one of his own airmen.

There are several reasons. In the first place, flying is comparatively in its infancy in Mexico and the airmen are not exceedingly skillful. Then, too, he would have to confide in the messenger, and he has no certainty that he would be discreet. In the third place, he believes that your great reputation would carry weight with Copenez. The old rascal would be enormously flattered to think that the greatest aviator in the world had been chosen to bear him a message and he'd probably come to terms with the Government at once. What do you say?"

Ted ruminated. He had time to spare. It was dangerous, yes. But when had that ever daunted Ted Scott? Danger was his constant bedfellow. And he would be helping Valdez, helping Mexico, helping the Ambassador, helping his own country. The venture appealed to his patriotism. It stirred his sporting blood.

"I'll do it!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet.

## CHAPTER IX

### A Secret Mission

"Where is Valdez? Take me to him," said Ted Scott, after having made his decision to undertake the mission to Manuel Copenez.

"I'll do that with pleasure," replied the Ambassador. "As a matter of fact, he is here in the Embassy. I can't tell you how I appreciate your undertaking this mission. If any one can bring it to a successful conclusion, you can."

"I'll do my best," promised Ted simply.

"Just one thing more," went on his host. "It's understood, is it not, that this is absolutely between ourselves? I am not to appear in it in any way."

"You can depend on me," replied Ted. "There is just one single exception that I would like to make. That is in the case of Mr. Hapworth. I came with him here, and he and I are the closest of friends. He would feel hurt and mystified, if I kept him in the dark. He is a gentleman of honor and standing, and

he will regard the secret as sacred. I can vouch for him."

"That will be satisfactory," conceded the Ambassador. "I have had business dealings with Mr. Hapworth in the States, and I know that he is a man of honor. And now, if you'll come with me, I will take you to Señor Valdez, who will have ready some papers to be delivered to Copenez."

He led the way to a remote apartment of the Embassy, where a young man was sitting near a window. He sprang from his seat as the others entered. He was a lithe, clean-cut specimen of manhood, with a handsome, sensitive face.

"You have met Mr. Scott before, Señor Valdez," said the Ambassador. "I am glad to tell you that he has agreed to undertake the mission we have in mind."

"A thousand thanks, Mr. Scott!" exclaimed Valdez, a look of great relief coming into his eyes. "It is a characteristic act on your part and I shall be forever grateful."

"I shall be glad to be of service, Señor Valdez," replied Ted, as he shook hands.

"I'll leave you two gentlemen together," said the Ambassador. "You can depend upon not being disturbed."

"I suppose you have been fully informed of the favor I have to ask of you, Mr. Scott,"

began Valdez, as the two seated themselves.

"The Ambassador stated the case," agreed Ted, "although there are a number of details that we shall have to discuss together. I need more information about the geography and topography of the place to which I am going and should also welcome some insight into the character of the man I am to see."

In response, Alfredo Valdez gave Ted all the facts he needed in order to act intelligently.

"Now, as to the time of starting," suggested Ted. "I suppose time is a big factor in the problem."

"It is, indeed," replied Valdez earnestly. "Of course it is too late to do anything to-day. But if you can start at dawn to-morrow, I shall be very grateful."

"I don't think there will be any difficulty about that," mused Ted. "I can get my fuel and supplies this evening. Luckily, I haven't any official engagements now in view that I would have to break. But one thing more. I should like to take some Mexican airman along with me who is familiar with the country over which I shall have to fly."

"To be sure," replied Valdez. "Now let me see," and he ran his fingers through his hair perplexedly.

"I'll tell you!" exclaimed Ted, as a thought struck him. "There's an airman named Juan

Bapo whom we rescued from a wreck on our flight to Mexico. He seems an intelligent fellow. As he thinks he owes me something, I'm sure he'd go if I asked him, and he'd probably keep quiet about the trip if I told him to."

"Just the man!" responded Valdez delightedly. "He's had experience as a flyer and has done some work for the Government. I'll hunt him up and send him to you. You can tell him that he will be well paid for his trouble. And while we're on this subject of compensation I—I—" he stammered and looked embarrassed.

"I know what you're thinking of," Ted came to his relief. "But you can get that off your mind at once. I don't want any payment of any kind. This is largely a sporting event with me, apart from the pleasure it is to me to be of some service to you and to the Ambassador. You can of course defray the cost of fuel and supplies, but nothing else."

"You are more than kind, Mr. Scott!" exclaimed Valdez warmly, "and I shall be your debtor for life."

The two young men conversed some time longer, settling some minor details of the trip, and then Valdez handed Ted the papers he was to deliver to the rebel chief and, with repeated thanks, took his leave.

Ted promptly sought out Walter Hapworth at his hotel.

"Well, Walter, I'm off, or will be by to-morrow morning," was Ted's greeting.

"Back to the States so soon?" asked Hapworth, in some surprise. "I thought you'd be with us a few days longer."

"Not to the States," explained Ted, and then, after exacting a pledge of secrecy, narrated in detail the events of the afternoon.

Hapworth gave vent to a prolonged whistle.

"You're a glutton for adventure," he ejaculated. "Going right into the lion's mouth! I've heard of Manuel Copenez. Fiery old rascal, as hot-tempered as the mischief. Has a habit of shooting first and asking questions afterward."

"Perhaps," laughed Ted. "But I'm in for it now. I'd ask you to go along with me, but I know you're right up to your neck in business."

"Right!" replied Hapworth. "I'd like nothing better than to go along, but I'll have to let it go by. Just got a telegram a few minutes ago that an important committee of stockholders from the States will be here to-morrow and I've got to be on the spot."

"Sure thing," agreed Ted. "I expect to take Bapo along with me. That is, if he can go.

He's an airman—how good a one I don't know, but I think I can trust him."

"You can without doubt," replied Hapworth. "You couldn't have made a better choice."

"Any new developments in the oil situation?" asked Ted, as he looked at the medley of papers on Mr. Hapworth's desk.

"No," replied Hapworth. "It would be a matter easily settled if our competitors didn't have those crooked officials behind them. But, by Jove, Ted!" he added, with a sudden access of excitement, "it's just occurred to me that this errand of yours, if you succeed, may help us out of the hole."

"Is that so?" asked Ted, in some surprise. "That will be fine. But, to tell the truth, I don't see the connection."

"You say that you're doing this especially for Valdez, Alfredo Valdez?"

"That's the man," replied Ted. "A fine, upstanding fellow he seems to be, too."

"He is," agreed Hapworth. "I understand he's related in some way to the President—a distant cousin or something of that kind. But apart from that, he's made his way by his own ability and is looked upon as a coming man in the Government. He stands very high with the national authorities, and a word from him has great influence."

"I guess that's true," admitted Ted. "Still I don't see—"

"Valdez will be enormously grateful to you if you reach and influence Copenez, won't he?" interrupted Hapworth.

"He said so," replied Ted. "Wanted to pay me, but I wouldn't take any money. Then he said he'd be in my debt for life."

"Just so. And at a word from you he'd put the screws on that gang of crooked politicians that are trying to undermine me and warn them to keep off and let justice have its way. They wouldn't dare to ignore a man in his position."

Ted nodded.

"I see the point!" he cried. "You'd have your fair chance to establish your rights in the courts."

"Exactly," replied Hapworth. "That's all I want. I don't want any undue favors—simply a fair chance, and may the best cause win. You know me well enough, Ted, to be sure that I wouldn't want you to use your influence to give me any unfair advantage. All I want is that the other fellows shan't have an unfair advantage. I want an even chance to get justice and nothing else."

"And you shall have it," cried Ted. "I'm sure Valdez will see that you get that fair

chance. Gee, I'm pleased to think I may be able to help you get justice! But perhaps I'm counting my chickens before they are hatched," he added, rather ruefully. "I may make a failure of this job of getting to Copenez."

"I'll risk that," replied Hapworth.

Later on, while in his own room at the hotel—for Ted had thought it best to leave the Embassy, so that it should not be mixed up at all in his departure—Juan Bapo knocked at the door and, on Ted's invitation, entered.

It was Ted's first really good chance to study the Mexican, and he took him in from head to foot. What he saw pleased him. Bapo's figure was wiry, his face indicated courage and resource and his eyes were frank and straightforward.

He was plainly awed in the presence of the famous young American aviator who had saved his life, but Ted Scott's pleasant smile and friendly greeting soon put him at ease. Ted was glad that Bapo spoke English fairly well, for his own Spanish was none too good.

"I suppose Señor Valdez has had a talk with you and told you what I wanted?" asked Ted.

"He tell me that I fly with you over the mountains," Bapo replied, with a flash of his white teeth.

"Yes," said Ted. "You will be well paid.

But I do not want you to make any mistake. It may be a dangerous flight. Danger in the air. Danger, perhaps, among bad men. I cannot tell you everything, for my mission is secret, but I tell you that much. There is danger. Think it over well before you decide to go."

"I have no need to theenk," replied Bapo. "You have a charm to your life. You can do anything. I will go weeth you."

"Good!" exclaimed Ted. "We start to-morrow at dawn. But we must put fuel and food in the plane to-night. Meet me at the flying field two hours from now."

Valdez had arranged for the supplies, and Ted found them at hand when he reached the flying field. Bapo was there, and the two worked until late, getting everything in readiness. During that time Ted gained additional confidence in his new helper as he saw how thoroughly he understood everything pertaining to a plane and the art of flying.

When the work was finished Ted put the plane under the care of a policeman whom Valdez had chosen as careful and reliable.

"At dawn, to-morrow, Bapo," said Ted Scott at parting.

"At dawn, señor," echoed Bapo.

## CHAPTER X

### Enemies at Work

"A fine morning, Bapo," said Ted Scott to his helper the next morning, as the two met at the entrance to the flying field.

Ted looked up at a cloudless sky. The crisp, early morning air was a tonic. The mountain range that bordered the city rose peak upon peak as far as the eye could see, and their tips were gilded by the first rays of the rising sun.

"All set to go," added the young aviator. "Would you like to land on the tip of that mountain, Bapo?" he joked, pointing to the towering peak of Popocatapetl.

"Pardon, señor," responded Bapo, "eet ees not the landing that would worry me, but how we landed. That makes all the difference, no?"

Ted laughed good-humoredly.

"Right you are," he said. "I should say that how we landed made all the difference—between life and death. However, we'll not think of death on a day like this," he added. "Such weather ought to bring good luck."

"In thees country, señor, we have need of all our luck."

But Ted Scott's optimistic mood refused to be dampened. If he had felt any doubts—and he had—as to the outcome of the venture to which he was now fully committed, those doubts were dissipated like the mists of the early morning before the sunshine of the new day. He knew that his quest was attended with serious peril, that Mexico was in an unsettled state, that in some sections death stalked abroad with impunity. Beyond those mountains there might be dangers of which he had at present no conception.

As he and his companion entered the confines of the field the young aviator quickened his step. The night before the *Silver Streak* had been left in perfect shape, groomed like a race-horse for her flight over the mountains. Now Ted was eager to give her one last looking over before the take-off.

An odd sound from his companion, half-grunt, half-cry, brought him up short.

"Look, señor!" the native pointed to something that lay inert upon the ground. "Some one has struck—in the dark!"

The young flyer ran forward. He bent over a huddled figure on the ground. It was that of the policeman who had been left to guard his plane. He had been gagged and bound, and

blood, oozing from a scalp wound, made the face look ghastly.

Ted's first thought was that the man was dead. But his hand, slipped beneath the victim's shirt, detected heartbeats.

"Just a scalp wound," Ted pronounced. "Unbind him, Bapo, and go for assistance. I will try to revive him while you are gone."

While Bapo was cutting the cords and removing the gag Ted ran over to the plane a few yards away.

He saw at a glance that some of the struts had been cut and the controls tampered with. But the injured man demanded his first attention and he deferred a more thorough examination until later. As he sought to revive the man, anger surged up in his heart at the doers of this dastardly deed.

Juan Bapo returned quickly with the official in charge of the field and several attendants. They were voluble in their comments on the outrage, but Ted stopped them short. He did not want too much made of the affair, lest knowledge of it should spread like wildfire through the Mexican capital. He preferred to assume that it was a mere ordinary depredation by petty thieves.

He took the chief aside.

"I want this kept quiet," he said. "Tell your men to say nothing about it. Take care

of the injured man and have him taken to his own home—not to the hospital. See that he has medical attendance and I will pay for it. It will be well worth your while to oblige me in this matter."

The chief promised without reservation, the more readily because he himself might be accused of careless supervision should the matter become generally known.

This disposed of, Ted Scott turned to the work of repairing the plane. This he found would require the entire day. He was wrathful, but kept doggedly at the work, assisted by Bapo and a couple of skilled mechanics whom the chief placed at his disposal.

Toward night the work was finished and Ted left Bapo in charge while he hurried to the hotel for a bath and a meal, promising to return to the field as soon as possible. He had planned that he and Bapo should sleep in the plane that night and take off the first thing in the morning.

It was a relief for Ted to unbosom himself to Hapworth, the only one in whom he could confide. He made at once for his friend's room.

Hapworth, busy at his desk, looked up indifferently, but when he saw who his visitor was jumped up with a start.

"Ted!" he exclaimed. "I thought you were

hundreds of miles away by this time! I've been following you in my thoughts all day. What's up? Have to turn back?"

Ted laughed grimly.

"Haven't left the ground yet," he explained, as he threw himself into a seat. "Been working all day repairing the plane that some scoundrels damaged last night."

As Walter Hapworth stared at him speechlessly, Ted commenced to narrate the happenings of the day.

Hapworth interrupted frequently with questions and after Ted had finished his friend sprang to his feet and walked the floor, fuming with wrath.

"The villains!" he exclaimed. "Did you get any inkling of their identity?"

"Not the slightest," replied Ted. "As a matter of fact, I haven't tried. Wanted to keep the thing dark. I suppose the police might have done something, but I held them back. After I return will be the time to look around for the rascals."

"I can hazard a pretty good guess as to their names," said Hapworth. "It's probable that they were the same fellows who invaded my room in Bromville, Ramirez and Alvaron."

"Do you think so?" queried Ted, with interest. "I hardly thought that they'd be able to get back here by this time."

"They might not have been able to do so by train," replied Mr. Hapworth. "But there was nothing to hinder them from hiring a plane. That's what they must have done, for I have trustworthy information that they were seen in Mexico City this morning. When I heard of it I was feeling thankful that you'd got off before they reached here. And you've been here all this time after all! You can be pretty sure they were the fellows at work last night."

"Likely enough," conceded Ted. "Though you were the man they were after, and I don't see why they should pay so much attention to my humble self."

"Because you were the one that thwarted their plans," declared Hapworth. "They've been meditating nothing but plans of vengeance, you may be sure, all the time they were on their way back. You didn't happen to be available last night, so they took it out on your plane. They'll try to injure you also, if they can. Do, Ted, be careful!"

"I will," promised Ted. "And I'm going to see that they don't do any more damage to the plane. I've just come here to have a bath and something to eat and then I'm going back to stay with the plane all night. Bapo is there right now."

"By the way, how do you like your new helper?" asked Hapworth.

"Fine," responded Ted. "I don't know yet about his flying ability, but he understands everything about a plane, and I believe he's absolutely trustworthy."

"He'll never forget that you saved his life," rejoined Hapworth. "He's yours, body and soul."

"*We* saved his life," amended Ted. "But I must run along now," he continued, rising and looking at his watch. "I don't like to be away from the plane a minute longer than necessary. Good-by, Walter."

"Good-by, Ted, and may luck be with you," said Hapworth fervently.

It was full dark when Ted Scott reached the flying field and the moon had not yet risen. He hurried toward the hangar in which the *Silver Streak* was lodged.

As he approached, the sound of a scuffle came to his ears. Then two men broke from the structure, one evidently in flight, the other in pursuit.

"Catch him!" cried a voice that Ted recognized as Bapo's. "Hold him, señor. Do not let him escape!"

## CHAPTER XI

### The Bomb Explodes

Ted Scott flung himself toward the fugitive but missed him by a hairbreadth. The force of the lunge made the aviator lose his balance and when he recovered it the man was flying like a rabbit down the field.

When Ted would have followed him, Bapo caught him by the arm.

"The bomb, señor!" gasped the Mexican. "The bomb!"

"What bomb?" asked Ted.

But the Mexican had already turned back toward the hangar. As Ted followed him, premonition went with him. Bapo's exclamation could mean only one thing. His enemies had attempted to blow up the plane. Was there still a chance that they might succeed?

Ted saw Bapo frantically searching the interior of the plane. Ted pulled him aside and got ahead of him.

"In there, señor!" panted Bapo. "He

threw in there something that ticked like a clock. But now I cannot find it."

Ted whipped out his flashlight. By its light he located the infernal machine, grabbed it, and jumped to the ground.

At a little distance was a deep pool used by the mechanics for various purposes. Ted dashed for this, bowling over Bapo in his frantic exit, and hurled the bomb into the water. Then he grabbed Bapo and pulled him down with him to the ground.

There was a muffled roar that would have been thunderous if it had not been deadened by the water.

A great volume of water was thrown up from the pool and fell about the two in a shower of spray.

Ted jumped to his feet. The Mexican rose shivering and stood beside him.

"The señor is safe," said Bapo thankfully.

"Yes, and the plane too, thanks to you," replied Ted, as he clapped Bapo cordially on the shoulder.

Ted looked around. To his great relief there was no sign of any commotion. The water had strangled the sound so that it had not attracted notice. Had the bomb exploded on the dry ground it would have brought a crowd almost at once.

"I told you there was danger in this mission

of mine," said Ted, "although I did not expect it to develop before we left the ground. There is still time to draw back, Bapo, if you like. I will not hold it against you."

"I go with you, señor," replied the Mexican, and his voice was as unconcerned as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened. Ted felt a heightening of respect for his helper.

"All right, as long as you do it with your eyes open," he said. "Now tell me all about this thing from the beginning."

"See man coming along like a ghos'," Bapo explained. "He keep close in the shadows by the side of the shed. He throw sometheeng in the plane. I make jump and catch hold of heem.

"But he ees strong and he wriggle like the snake. He sleep from my hand just as I see you coming. I shout to stop heem. But again he wriggle like the snake and get away."

"Do you know the man?" asked Ted. "Have you ever seen him anywhere in the city?"

"I know heem," replied Bapo. "Is bad man. Queeck with the knife. His name is Ramirez. Many times—" Bapo threw out his ten fingers in an expressive gesture—"he be arrest by the police. He ees very bad man."

"Ramirez!" muttered Ted to himself. Walter had been right, then. The scoundrel he had chased in the streets of Bromville was per-

meated with the desire for vengeance. Twice he had tried to sate that vengeance.

Here was a foe to be reckoned with, and before Ted stretched a long night in which anything might happen. To be sure he could summon the superintendent of the field and have a strong guard placed about the plane. But this would provoke the gossip and curiosity the young aviator was anxious to avoid.

His resolution was taken promptly.

"Bapo," he said, "is there any other flying field within a short distance of Mexico City?"

Bapo shook his head.

"Not nearer than a hundred and feefty miles," he replied.

Ted had no wish to travel that far by night in a totally unfamiliar country. He tried again.

"Well, then," he asked, "can you think offhand of any big field—pasture land would do—within ten or twenty miles that would be smooth enough for landing at night?"

Bapo cogitated for a moment.

"There is one on a big estate about eighteen miles away," he said. "There are no trees on it nor any houses near. Eet ees smooth like the top of the table. I came down there once myself when I have some trouble with the engine."

"Good!" exclaimed Ted. "Do you think

you can find it for me when the moon rises? It will be up in half an hour."

"Most assuredly," replied Bapo, without the slightest hesitation. "I know eet as I know the way to my house. I will show you."

Ted drew a breath of relief. Once in that security, he and Bapo could have the long and peaceful sleep that they needed in preparation for their journey. There was no telling when they would be able to sleep again.

He chuckled at the pictured discomfiture of their enemies if they should make any further attempt on the plane that night when they crept up only to find that the *Silver Streak* had disappeared and was beyond their reach.

A half hour later the moon appeared on the horizon. Ted waited until it had risen higher in the heavens and had flooded the earth with glory. Then he and Bapo wheeled the plane out from its hangar, made one last minute inspection, and put on their gloves and helmets.

The motor began to hum, the *Silver Streak* zipped along the runway and mounted into the air gracefully.

Below stretched the multitudinous lights of Mexico City. To the right loomed up the great range of mountains that kept guard like sentinels over the capital.

Ted turned the nose of the plane in the direction that Bapo indicated, and they were off.

In less than twenty minutes Bapo reached over and touched Ted's arm, the signal agreed on when they should be near their destination.

Ted looked below and singled out what seemed from that height a broad, level plateau. He looked toward Bapo with a question in his eyes. The Mexican nodded.

Confirmed in his belief, Ted swooped down in a wide spiral until he was close enough to make his calculations. Then, almost as gently as a swan settling down upon her nest, Ted brought the plane to a perfect landing.

He unstrapped himself and jumped out. Bapo followed his example. Ted found himself on ground as smooth as Bapo had described it. As far as he could see in the bright moonlight, there were no trees and not a sign of human habitation. No sound broke the stillness, except the droning hum of insects. It was a place of idyllic peace and beauty.

"You're surely a good picker, Bapo," Ted said cordially to his helper. "This place seems made to order for us. No worry now about bombs or knives. Now you wrap your blanket about you and settle down to sleep. I'll take the first watch and call you when the night is half over. Then you can stand guard the rest of the time and call me at the first sign of daybreak. Tumble in now."

Bapo protested that he would stand guard

all the night. He could doze in the fuselage the next day while Señor Scott was navigating the plane. But Ted would have none of this, and Bapo obeyed.

Really, Ted told himself, they could probably both sleep the whole night through in perfect safety. Their enemies were in all likelihood put entirely off the track. Still, he was taking no chances. The responsibility that rested on him was too heavy for that.

There were moments when he wondered why he had assumed that responsibility. He had not had to do it. He might even now be winging his way happily northward to the comfort and security of Bromville.

Instead, he had already incurred danger to life and limb. He had narrowly escaped having his precious plane destroyed. And on the morrow he would embark on a mission loaded to the guards with peril.

Then he thought of the Ambassador whose negotiations in the interest of his country would be made easier if the mission succeeded. He thought of the friendly young diplomat whose career he might save from ruin. He thought of the lives and treasure that would be saved if he could prevent the outbreak of one of the revolutions that had so often brought misery to Spanish America. He thought of Walter Hapworth, whose chances of justice would be

measurably increased if he brought his task to a successful conclusion.

Yes, it was worth it. There were rich prizes to be won, great service to be done. He was glad that he had undertaken it. And he looked forward to the dangers confronting him with calm and unshakeable courage, without the quivering of an eyelid.

A little after one o'clock he called Bapo and he himself lay down to sleep. Bapo woke him at dawn and they prepared and partook of a hasty breakfast. Then the engine roared, the *Silver Streak* soared aloft, and the gallant young aviator turned the nose of his plane toward the mountain fastnesses among which dwelt Manuel Copenez.

Manuel Copenez, rebel, revolutionist, the man who, Walter Hapworth had said, shot first and asked questions afterward!

## CHAPTER XII

### The Lightning Bolt

In order to clear the mountain peaks with a good margin to spare, Ted sent the *Silver Streak* shooting up into the sky until he had attained a height of twenty thousand feet.

From that commanding height he was able to command a view of a vast section of Mexico. His course would naturally have taken him over the capital, but for fear that the markings of his plane might be identified and thus start speculation as to the goal of his flight he made a great semicircle and passed the city several miles to the south.

Then he laid his course in the direction he had been told would take him to Quezaba, the main city of the province controlled by Copenez.

As the *Silver Streak* whizzed along, Ted studied in the glass that was attached to his instrument board the reflection of Bapo's features. The Mexican's face was grave, but not alarmed. If he appreciated the dangers that

might be encountered, he was evidently prepared to meet them courageously.

"Plucky beggar!" Ted soliloquized. "I'm fortunate to have him as a companion."

An impish impulse to get an expression of surprise, if not of fear, out of the stolid Mexican prompted Ted to send the machine into a sudden nose dive, so abrupt that it seemed as though the plane were whirling helplessly toward the earth. But when he righted the plane and glanced again into the mirror, Bapo's face was as impassive as ever.

"He'll do," Ted muttered to himself. "Never turned a hair."

The sun had been unclouded at the start, but gradually a haze began to spread through the atmosphere that caused Ted a qualm of uneasiness. If this persisted, he would have to fly unguided, save by his instruments.

Over a level country this would not have been difficult. But they were now in a mountainous region where the utmost care must be taken to avoid coming into collision with one of the towering peaks.

Still, by maintaining altitude he could avoid that peril, if the weather continued calm. But if a gale should develop, it might beat the plane down to a lower level despite all his efforts to prevent it.

Ted remembered that he was now south of

the Rio Grande and in a semi-tropical country where storms were far more furious than in the United States. He recalled the hurricane in the West Indies, from whose wrath he had barely escaped with his life.

He reached his hand out of the window of the cockpit. It was wet when he drew it in again. The air was saturated with moisture and a rainfall was threatening.

For the rain itself he cared little. He could at need rise above the clouds. It was the wind that might accompany the rain that he held most in dread.

He sent a little note through the tube which read:

"What is your guess about the weather, Bapo?"

The answer came back:

"A storm is coming. Rain and much wind."

Even now the wind was beginning to stir in faint, moaning gusts that steadily grew stronger and more frequent.

Had Ted been flying over a level country, he would have thought it prudent to land until the storm was overpast. But the occasional glimpses he caught through rifts in the haze of the ground beneath disclosed nothing but sharp peaks and deep gorges.

Landing was clearly out of the question.

There was nothing to do but to let the plane drive and take whatever was to come.

The rain came down at first in pattering drops and then more heavily until it was falling in torrents. Lightning began to flash, thunder to roll. Then a blast struck the plane that nearly turned it topsy-turvy.

With a great effort Ted brought it again to an even keel and held it before the wind.

Before long it was blowing a hurricane. The frail plane was like a pigmy in the hands of a giant. The thunder rolled continuously and the lightning played about the plane, bathing it in an uncanny radiance. Then there came a blinding flash and a sound of splintering.

Ted's eyes, dazzled by the glare, could not at first detect what part of the plane had been struck. But he was conscious at once of a certain unsteadiness that made the plane hard to handle. A glance at the fuselage showed that no damage had been done there. Then his eyes darted to the wings. That on the right was intact, but at the left there was a huge tear in the fabric!

The delicate balance of the plane had been destroyed.

Had the wing been entirely shattered the *Silver Streak* would have dropped to the earth like a plummet. As it was, the tear in it made

it impossible to keep the plane on an even keel. And the tear was being rapidly widened by the wind that tore at it in demoniac glee.

All of Ted Scott's superb skill and craftsmanship were called into play. At a sign from him, Bapo shifted some of the supplies over to the right to keep the plane from capsizing. Ted jockeyed the machine as a rider does his tiring steed, hoping against hope to avoid catastrophe.

One thing gave him a gleam of hope. The gale was diminishing in force. If he could only keep the plane afloat until the wind had blown itself out!

Through the haze, that was now shredding away, he could see at times the territory beneath. He noted with a thrill of relief that the mountains were dwindling to foothills, with occasional comparatively smooth plateaus that promised a possible landing place. He had evidently surmounted the range and was reaching the valley on the farther side.

Gradually he brought the plane lower and lower until he could see more clearly. He thought he could detect what seemed like two straight parallel bars that stretched away into the distance.

A railroad track! Whoever had laid that track had chosen as level a place as the region

afforded. Somewhere near that track must be a spot where he could bring the *Silver Streak* to earth.

Presently the storm ceased and the haze vanished. Ted felt a touch on his shoulder.

"There, señor," the Mexican shouted in his ear, pointing eagerly to a point a little to the right of the railroad track but separated from it by a dense growth of underbrush.

Ted nodded and turned the nose of the plane in that direction. The place indicated seemed suitable enough for a landing, though rough in places. But Ted was in no position to choose. He had to take what chance offered him.

In ever narrowing circles he dropped to the ground. As he had feared, it was not ideal, and the *Silver Streak* made heavy going of it as she floundered over and between the bumps. But she made it, and Ted finally brought her to a stop.

He jumped out, followed by Bapo, and flung himself at full length on the ground, exhausted by the terrific strain he had been under.

"A close call, Bapo," he gasped.

The Mexican was looking at him with awe and an almost dog-like devotion in his eyes.

"You are wonderful, señor," he said. "There ees no other man living that could do what you have done. I do not wonder now at your flying over the oceans. Eet was—what

you call eet?—a miracle. I prayed to the saints, but you—I theenk you were much too busy to pray, no?"

"I guess I did in my heart," returned Ted. "And I know there was some one at home praying for me," he added to himself, as he thought of Charity.

They lay there recuperating for a while, and then Ted Scott rose to his feet and examined his loved plane.

"Poor old girl!" he murmured, as he patted it caressingly. "You've had a hard time of it. But you didn't let me down. You never will."

Bapo looked at him in wonder.

"You talk to eet?" he said. "Does eet understand?"

Ted laughed.

"Not exactly, Bapo," he replied. "Though it sometimes seems so from the way she minds everything I say. Never a kick, no matter how hard a job I give her. Never demands a rise in wages. What she does she does for love."

The Mexican crossed himself. This talk of the young aviator sounded too much like magic to make him feel entirely comfortable.

Ted set to work, assisted by Bapo, to repair the plane. The tear was a large one, but it had damaged the fabric without greatly injuring the structure. Still, it would take several hours to make it as good as it was before, and Ted, al-

though he chafed at the delay, was not to be satisfied with a transient repair.

He had a full kit of all the necessary tools and plenty of material for the mending, and under his hands and those of Bapo, who proved himself a skillful mechanic, the work progressed rapidly.

Perhaps two hours had passed before Ted stepped back and pronounced the work complete. He was restoring his tools to their place when his ear was caught by the far-off clattering of hoofs.

Bapo had heard the sound at the same instant and a look of uneasiness came into his eyes.

"Seems like a bunch of riders," remarked Ted. "Perhaps it is a troop of Mexican cavalry out for a jaunt."

"No, señor," replied Bapo. "Not at this distance from Mexico City. More likely bandits. There are plenty in thees country. We must hide, señor."

It was good advice, for the two of them could not hope to hold their own against such a number as was indicated by the thud of hoofs that was steadily growing louder. Their lives might pay the penalty of being discovered. At the very least they would be robbed, while the plane would be looted and probably destroyed.

"Quick, Bapo!" directed Ted. "Help me

roll the plane into the shadow of these bushes."

Bapo complied, and in a moment the plane was safe from detection. Then the two adventurers threw themselves flat upon the ground behind a screen of underbrush.

They had not long to wait. The clatter of hoofs became more pronounced, then a troop of more than twenty men came into view, riding hard.

It was a hard-bitten crowd that was revealed. The men had no uniforms and rode in irregular order. Under their broad sombreros showed swarthy, unshaven faces bearing the lines of cruelty and crime. It was a gang of tatterdemalions ripe for any iniquity.

At their head rode a man who, though young in years, was old in evil. A scar on the right side of his face from ear to mouth marred what would otherwise have been a handsome face. He bestrode a superb black horse—stolen no doubt in a raid on some hacienda. His saddle had silver ornaments and his clothes had a kind of barbaric splendor, all the more marked because of the contrast with the rough garments of his followers.

Ted felt a touch on his arm.

"It is Mendez, señor," whispered Bapo, "the worst bandit in Mexico. He steal. He keell. He have no peety on any one. If he see us, we are dead."

Luckily, the path chosen by the outlaws ran at right angles to the brush where the two were crouching. It led directly to the railroad track.

The gang passed from view and Ted breathed a sigh of relief.

"I guess they're gone now," he murmured. "High time for us to be going too. What's that?"

The exclamation was caused by the sudden cessation of the hoof beats.

"They seem to have halted," Ted whispered. "I wonder why. Could one of them have seen us after all?"

"Eet ees not that," replied Bapo. "They stop because they have come to the railroad track."

At that moment a faint whistle of a train came from up the line.

A light broke upon Ted.

"I see!" he exclaimed. "They are going to hold up the train!"

"Si, señor," agreed Bapo. "Eet ees time for us to go. We cannot do anything against so many."

Prudence counseled this, and yet something in Ted revolted against taking to the plane and escaping. What Bapo had said seemed perfectly true. Two men could not hope to make head against a score or more of well-armed desperadoes.

Had it been, he would have tried to signal and stop the train. But it was coming from the opposite direction and the outlaw band was between him and it. He could not possibly emerge from his hiding place without immediate detection.

In any event he resolved to try. He might not be able to do anything, but at least he would be there on the alert for any opportunity. Perhaps the passengers and guards would put up a fight. In that case he would join with them.

"Come, Bapo," he said, "we will get nearer the track where we can see." Then, noting that the Mexican hesitated, he said: "But I have no right to ask you to come if you would rather not. You can stay here with the plane if you like."

"No, señor," replied Bapo, "I go with you. It may be that we go to die, but I will go."

"You're true blue, Bapo," replied Ted. "Come along, then. You have a revolver?"

"Si, señor," replied Bapo, "and this, too," and he drew from his belt a long knife.

"Good!" replied Ted, as he drew out his own automatic pistol and held it ready for action. "Come."

Like snakes, they wriggled their way through the undergrowth until they had come in full view of the track. As they approached they

heard a series of whistles and the grinding of brakes as the train came to a stop.

Ted saw that the outlaws had built a barricade of ties upon the track to halt the train. A wreck would surely have resulted had the train attempted to knock the barrier aside, and there was no alternative but to stop.

A volley of shots rang out, not aimed at the train or its occupants, but designed to strike terror into any who might think of resistance.

Rough hands pulled the engineer and firemen from the cab and hurled them to one side. A pair of outlaws jumped on the steps of each car and with leveled rifles commanded the passengers to come out.

Under guard of twenty rifles the luckless passengers obeyed. They had no leader and there was no thought of organized resistance. It would have led simply to wholesale slaughter.

The passengers, men and women alike, were lined up at the side of the train and commanded to deliver over their valuables. They had no alternative but to obey. If there was any hesitation, it was quelled with a blow or the prod of a rifle.

Wallets, rolls of bills, coin, watches, and jewelry were handed over and tossed by the bandits to several of their number, who deftly stowed the loot away in burlap bags.

The bandit leader directed the operations

with a triumphant smile on his wicked face. His eyes glowed with avarice as he saw the richness and extent of the treasure. This was a day to be marked with a white stone in his calendar.

But his eyes glowed still more when they fell upon a young girl who had emerged from the train and had been trying to keep herself as inconspicuously in the background as possible. She was very lovely, but her face was pale and her eyes big with terror.

The leader of the bandits made a sign to two of his men, and they took her by the arms and led her to where he was standing. She struggled in their grasp, but to no purpose.

The leader took off his silver-trimmed sombrero and nearly swept the earth with it as he made a profound bow.

"Ah, señorita," he said, "I recognized you at once. The niece of my deadliest enemy. And so beautiful!"

The girl shrank back.

"I—I do not know you," she stammered. "Let me go."

"We do not part so readily," replied the bandit. "When the train goes on you will stay behind. It is not fitting that one so beautiful should travel on a common train. You shall ride my own horse. I will take you to my hacienda where you will have every comfort

and be treated with the most profound respect." But his smile was mocking.

Ted's blood boiled in his veins. During the progress of this colloquy, he had managed to creep nearer through the thick underbrush that formed a perfect screen until he was almost within arm's length of the group.

"Let me go!" cried the girl, now frantic with fright. "My uncle will give you anything you ask. Let me go! Let me go!"

Her voice rose to a shriek as she struggled to free herself from the two ruffians who held her securely.

The face of the bandit chief darkened.

"Enough of this," he snarled. "Take her away," he commanded. "Hold her until after the train starts. Then I will give you further orders. My compliments, señorita," and he grinned evilly.

At their leader's command the rascals started to drag the girl away.

Stepping backward to execute another of his mocking bows, the bandit leader almost stumbled over Ted Scott crouching among the bushes. The next second Ted's hand had the fellow by the collar while his pistol bored into the scoundrel's back.

"Hands up!" cried Ted.

## CHAPTER XIII

### Turning the Tables

It may have been that the bandit chief was paralyzed into immobility by the suddenness of Ted Scott's attack. At any rate, he stood still.

"Hands up, I say." Ted prodded him with his weapon, and the prod was very suggestive.

Reluctantly the bandit lifted his hands above his head.

His men, seeing the strange gesture and not having heard Ted's command nor descried his form, hidden behind the chief, were puzzled. The two who were leading the girl away paused. Several of the others started hesitantly toward their leader.

The young aviator was not deceived for a moment as to what would happen should the bandits decide to rush him. A short stand, a fallen enemy or two, and then he and Bapo would be killed or, what was worse, captured and held for torture.

Only strategy could hope to win for him.

Ted held one trump card. Reason told him that he must play it now or never.

"Tell your men to stay where they are." The automatic pressed hard against the back of the bandit chief. "If they come a step nearer, you are a dead man."

Ted's voice must have carried conviction. At any rate, the leader shouted a curt command and the advance stopped suddenly. The men stood in their tracks, looking increasingly puzzled.

"I have you in my power," Ted said rapidly. "If you attempt to drop your hands to your sides or call your men to you, I will deal with you as I would with a rattlesnake."

The bandit scowled and glanced over his shoulder in an endeavor to bring his assailant within range of his vision.

"Who are you?" he growled.

"Never mind that," replied Ted crisply. "Call me the man with a finger on the trigger and let it go at that. I ought to kill you now and rid the world of a scoundrel. But your only safety lies in doing what I say. I'm in deadly earnest. I warn you. You have no time to lose."

"What do you want of me?" the chief snarled.

"This," replied Ted. "Return to the robbed passengers the things you have taken from

them and order your men to permit them to board the train again and go on their way."

"Is that all you wish, señor?" asked the bandit, with ironic politeness.

"No," said Ted quickly. "You must release the girl also, and at once."

" 'Must' is not a word that one uses lightly to Antonio Mendez," retorted the bandit, his dark face flushing with anger.

"I am using it," declared Ted. "You will do as I say and be quick about it."

He dug the muzzle deeper till the outlaw winced.

"I'll give you until I count three to make up your mind," said Ted. "One—two—"

Scowling frightfully, Antonio Mendez made up his mind. There is something undoubtedly compelling in a pistol pressed against one's spine.

In furious tones Mendez called to his men. They listened with a look of bewilderment, blended with sullenness. One even tried to expostulate, but was brought up with a viciousness that blanched his face and sent him scurrying to obey orders. There was no question as to who was boss in the Mendez gang. They were held under a rule of iron.

The mysteriously benefited passengers appeared almost as mystified as the outlaws. They could not credit their good fortune. Some

of them assumed that it was only a trick on the part of their enemies to lead them into a worse predicament and they accepted their returned property suspiciously but joyfully. They scurried aboard the train when they were told to do so with a haste that bordered on panic.

The girl whom Mendez had intended to kidnap still stood between her captors. She watched proceedings with a growing incredulity. In her expression hope struggled with terror.

"Release the girl," commanded Ted sharply. "Be quick about it."

Mendez hesitated. There was a significant prod in his back.

"Let the girl go," he ordered gruffly. "She is not worth the trouble."

The girl stumbled over to the train, weak with terror. Half a dozen hands were reached down to draw her aboard. Just before she stepped to the platform she turned and, finding herself in line with the young aviator, a look of wonder and admiration flashed into her big, dark eyes.

Mendez watched gloweringly while the engineer climbed to his place and the train, with the barricade removed, began slowly to puff and groan its way up the steep incline.

Ted felt a tug at his sleeve.

"Quick!" urged Bapo. "Now is the time for us to fly. Come before it is too late."

"Right," replied Ted cheerfully. "But we're going to make a clean getaway, Bapo. Trust me."

Again he spoke to the scowling Mendez.

"I want you to do one thing more," Ted began.

"I will do nothing more!" cried Mendez furiously. "Take that thing from my back, or I will have my men attack you—"

"But before they reach me you will be dead," Ted retorted. "If you care to live, Mendez, you will do what I say."

There was a brief pause, and Ted knew that his life and Bapo's hung in the balance. Suppose the chief, maddened beyond all control, should defy him and order his men to the attack? To be sure he could kill Mendez. But he was absolutely certain that that would sound the death knell for him and his helper.

"Speak," snarled Mendez. "What do you want?"

"That's better," replied Ted. "First, order your men once more to stay where they are."

"What would you do with me?"

"Nothing, if you are wise and do as I say."

"And after that?"

"After that, you will walk backward with me

through the brush until I tell you to stop," was the reply.

"And if I refuse?"

"Then I will shoot you as I would a mad dog," Ted said promptly.

Mendez gave the required order to his men. Although they muttered among themselves, his dominance was so complete that they made no move to disobey him.

Slowly Ted backed with his captive toward the place where he had left the *Silver Streak.* Bapo accompanied them, his watchful eye on the captive, his knife in his left hand and revolver in his right.

When they were close to the plane Ted halted.

"Far enough," he said. "Now I have only one thing more to demand of you, Antonio Mendez. After that you will be free to do as you like."

"The señor is kind."

"I think so too," agreed Ted cheerfully. "I might have shot you at any time during the last half hour, Mendez, and the world would have been well rid of a scoundrel. Have a care!" for the fellow had made a swift, furious movement. "I might remind you again that this revolver is loaded. Besides, I have a friend here who would not hesitate to use both knife and pistol if he thought it necessary."

"What is this last thing you want of me?" snarled Mendez.

"To stand perfectly quiet while my friend here goes through your clothes for weapons. Search him, Bapo. That's it—thanks."

Two murderous-looking knives and a revolver rewarded the search. Bapo threw them into the plane.

"Now, do me the favor to stay just where you are, hands high above your head," said Ted, backing toward the plane. "That's right. You will be covered until we are on our way."

He motioned Bapo to take his seat in the plane. Then, while his helper still kept the chief under his pistol, Ted started the motor and jumped into his seat. The hum of the motor rose to a roar. A swift adjustment of the controls, and the *Silver Streak* started on its run.

There was a quick exclamation from Bapo. Through the roar of the motor Ted heard a sharp report. A bullet tore past him, fanning his cheek!

## CHAPTER XIV

### A Narrow Escape

"Too close for comfort," muttered Ted Scott as he ducked low to avoid further bullets, shielding himself as best he could.

He heard a movement behind him and then the sound of another shot.

"Bapo returning the fire," he thought. "I wish my hands were free so that I could join him in the shooting."

Bapo leaned over and shouted in his ear:

"It was Mendez, señor." There was triumph in his voice as he added, "I got heem, señor. I saw heem drop hees gun and catch hold of hees arm. Me, I would have been glad if the bullet had pierced hees heart."

"Good work, Bapo!" Ted shouted back.

"So it was Mendez that fired the shot," thought Ted wonderingly. "That fellow must carry an arsenal. Yet I thought Bapo had searched him thoroughly."

He glanced downward and saw that Mendez

with his unwounded arm was restoring a revolver to his boot.

"So that's it," thought Ted. "After this, if I search any of these gentry, I'll make them strip."

The plane soared upward, riding easily, its engine a smooth drone of power. Ted could not resist taking one more look at the discomfited rascals. He turned the nose of the machine toward the spot where the men were gathered about their chief, who had now rejoined the band and was having his injured arm bound up by one of their number.

They stared upward as the plane roared above their heads, but high enough to be out of gun reach. Ted leaned over the side and waved his hand mockingly.

Their hands leaped instinctively to their belts and several shots were fired, though it was a gesture of fury, since they could not hope that their bullets would carry that distance.

Ted laughed aloud.

"Too late, you rascals," he chuckled. "Nothing doing, unless you happen to have an anti-aircraft gun strapped to one of your mules."

Then he swung the plane around and headed it in the direction of the mountain fastnesses where Manuel Copenez ruled supreme.

The scene that had just transpired left Ted

Scott with a glow of triumph in his heart. For a one-man—or at most a two-men—job, he congratulated himself that it could not have passed off better.

The odds had been tremendously against him and his helper. Ted had matched himself against Antonio Mendez and his band and won.

It was not the least of his satisfactions that he had won without taking life. He rejoiced that this had not proved necessary.

But gradually a certain uneasiness crept into his content.

He had been of service to the people on the train. He had been of still more signal service to that terror-stricken girl with the white face and the great dark eyes. He thanked the fates that had brought him to that place at that moment.

But he did not disguise from himself that in thus playing the rôle of a deliverer he had made a deadly enemy of a man who seemed to be very powerful and important in that part of the country. For Mendez in himself he did not care a straw. His enmity or his favor did not count.

But suppose Mendez were in some fashion tied up with Manuel Copenez, possibly a trusted lieutenant of the latter! This was not beyond the range of possibility. To be sure, Mendez was a bandit. But Copenez himself might not

be too scrupulous in that matter and might be willing to give his henchmen a rather free rein in the matter of private loot, provided they came to his aid when he was organizing a military expedition.

If this were true, Ted Scott admitted to himself that the enmity of a man like Antonio Mendez would do no good to the cause to which he was committed.

"I will have one enemy at court to begin with," he told himself.

Still, the young aviator felt that with luck he would reach the rebel chieftain long before Mendez could possibly hope to do so.

"I'll have arranged things with Copenez and be on my way back to Mexico City before Mendez gets over the mountains," he assured himself. "The only danger is that we may be forced down again, in which case Mendez may have a chance to even the score."

He was more eager than ever now to get his mission over with. He was beginning to realize that Mexico was not a country in which it was well for alien travelers to linger voluntarily.

When he had started that morning Ted had hoped to reach his destination that same day. The distance was over a thousand miles, but, traveling at the rate of a hundred miles an hour or more, it would not have been beyond the ca-

pacity of the *Silver Streak* to cover it before night fell.

Now he realized that to accomplish this was impossible. He had lost hours in repairing the plane and in thwarting the designs of the bandit chief.

As to flying through the night, that was out of the question among these wild mountains. It was hard enough to find his destination in the daylight with his imperfect knowledge of the country. He would have to find some place to camp through the night and renew his journey at the first streak of dawn on the morrow.

He suddenly realized that he was thirsty. He turned his head toward the Mexican and raised his free hand to his lips and made the gesture of drinking as a sign to his helper to hand him the bottle of water.

Bapo nodded in sign that he understood and reached down to get the bottle.

Ted, in the glass before him, noted a look of consternation that came over the Mexican's face. The latter rummaged among some things at his feet, at first perplexedly and then frantically. Then he straightened up and bent over to shout in Ted's ear.

"No water!" he cried. "No coffee! No food! No anytheeng!"

Ted, with a sinking at the heart, remembered.

They had had a hasty lunch when they had been engaged in repairing the plane and had removed the eatables and drinkables from the plane intending to put them back before they left. Ted could see them now in his mind's eye laid at one side on the turf. Then had come the fracas with Mendez and their hasty departure in the plane. The supplies had been forgotten.

Had they discovered their loss sooner, they could have put back to recover them after Mendez and his band had left. But that had been nearly three hours ago, and in the interim the plane had traveled hundreds of miles.

Not a drop to drink! Not a crumb to eat! And perhaps twenty-four or possibly forty-eight hours might elapse before they reached their destination.

But what was done was done and that was all there was to it. Now a landing became doubly imperative.

In the mountainous region where they were there was no sign of a village or any human habitation. They might find fruits of some kind, though this was doubtful. But there were mountain brooks and they could probably get water. With plenty of that, even without food, they could still their cravings to some extent.

The afternoon was now far advanced and the

young aviator scanned the landscape anxiously for a possible landing place, preferably near some stream.

"Sounds easy when you say it quick," he muttered to himself, "but try to find it."

But, search as he would, he could not find a suitable spot. All about him were jagged peaks between which ran deep gorges. Occasionally he had glimpses of a more level stretch of land, but so studded with rocks or trees that to attempt a landing would have been to commit suicide.

The shadows began to gather and the sun had almost disappeared in the west. Ted was oppressed with terrible anxiety. If he did not land soon, he would have to stay in the air all night, and that meant the consumption of gas that he could not afford. He had allowed himself an ample margin for his journey, but he could not waste it through ten hours of darkness in aimless wandering.

His eye caught something that gleamed in the rays of the setting sun like a thread of molten gold. Bapo had discovered it at the same time and he leaned over and shouted in Ted's ear.

"Water, señor!"

Ted nodded and brought his plane lower, scanning every acre of the land beneath.

Something came in his vision that offered a

gleam of hope. It was a broad ledge jutting from the side of the mountain, perhaps two hundred feet in width and of a length that could not be determined, although it looked long enough to permit the plane to be brought to a stop before it ended.

Just beyond it was a stream that ran at the bottom of a gorge. Ted judged that, if he were able to make the landing on the ledge, he or Bapo could scramble down the rocky sides to the stream.

"Worth trying," thought the aviator, as he pushed on the joystick and brought the plane to a lower level.

Down and down he floated in narrowing spirals. The ledge he saw was bumpy, and yet free from trees or large rocks.

His eyes narrowed and the muscles of his jaws grew taut.

The mountain, a dark ominous shape, seemed to leap toward him, a ruthless enemy bent on his destruction.

Ted's timing was perfect. The wheels touched the ground so lightly that they scarcely seemed to make contact with it.

But swiftly, far too swiftly, they skimmed over stone and dirt, approaching with terrifying speed the brink of the ledge with a sheer drop to the ravine below.

## CHAPTER XV

### An Ugly Adversary

The speed of the *Silver Streak* diminished, but not enough. Calculating swiftly, Ted Scott saw that it would not stop in time. His jaw hardened with swift resolution as he saw his only chance and took it.

As the plane neared the edge of that awful drop he wrenched it suddenly about and drove straight for the side of the mountain.

The plane careened crazily. One wing drooped toward the ground, grazing it. The mountain towered overhead, a brooding Nemesis. The young air pilot and his helper braced themselves for the crash.

Then the *Silver Streak* halted, trembled, came to a standstill. A bare two feet separated the adventurers from certain disaster, probable maiming, possible death.

Ted Scott exulted grimly.

"As close a call as ever I had," he muttered. "Charity must have been praying for me."

He climbed stiffly to the ground.

Juan Bapo's face had a greenish pallor and his lips were muttering a prayer. His eyes had a staring look, as of one who had looked on death at terrifyingly close range.

Ted unfastened the straps that bound his helper to the seat.

"Scared?" he inquired.

"Better men than Juan Bapo might have been scared for less," returned the Mexican dryly.

Ted nodded.

"My own heart missed a beat," he acknowledged. "But the main thing is that we came through all right."

Bapo got out and together the two approached the edge of the chasm and looked down at the little stream that ran at the bottom.

"It will be hard to reach the stream from here," remarked Bapo.

"It will, indeed," agreed Ted.

He stared down into the steadily thickening dusk. It would be a dangerous descent to make even in broad daylight. To attempt it now would be sheer folly.

Reluctantly he turned to Bapo.

"Nothing can be done till morning," he affirmed. "We'll have to go hungry and thirsty till then, Bapo."

"My mouth ees dry like wool," remarked Bapo.

"Mine too," agreed Ted. "It's maddening to look at that cool water and not to be able to get a drop of it. But we'll chew on bullets for a while and that will help our thirst. Then we'll go to sleep and forget all about it. It'll be morning before we know it, and then we'll drink to our hearts' content."

The day had been warm, but the night was cool, and the airmen derived some comfort from a fire which they made from shrubs and bits of twigs and dried grass.

"We have had hard luck to-day, Bapo," observed Ted, as they basked in the grateful warmth. "First the storm, then the delay for repairs, then the trouble with Mendez, then forgetting the supplies."

"To-morrow our luck maybe she change," returned Bapo.

"Bound to," said Ted confidently. "I hope that by to-morrow night this time we'll be having a good supper in the camp of Copenez."

"Copenez," repeated Bapo, crossing himself as though to ward off the thought of danger that the name evoked.

"You don't seem to care much for him," remarked Ted.

"No," admitted Bapo. "A hard man. What the Americanos call 'tough guy.' If happen he feel good, all right. If he feel bad—"

Again he crossed himself.

"Let's hope he's feeling good," observed Ted, a bit grimly. "And now for want of anything better to do I think we'd better sleep, Bapo. We'll be starting bright and early tomorrow morning. There's one good thing about camping on a mountain ledge," he added, "we're not likely to have any visitors."

"Except snakes," Bapo returned imperturbably. "Rattler, she go everywhere."

"Pleasant thought," chuckled Ted. "For my own peace of mind you might have left that out, Bapo. However, I'll sleep, rattler or no rattler."

They bunked down close by the *Silver Streak* and were soon wrapped in the deep sleep of physical exhaustion. Dawn found them still unmoving, drugged with weariness.

Ted woke first and jumped to his feet. The sun was flinging gold and scarlet banners across the sky; mountain peaks were touched to glory by its rays.

A little way before him Ted saw what seemed to be the end of the world but was only the end of the ledge.

He walked over to it and stared down on a scene of wild beauty such as he had rarely beheld. The rocks and shrubs gleamed with the early morning moisture and sent out a thousand glittering splinters of light where the sun struck them. At the foot of the cliff, not so far away

as it had seemed in the dusk of the night before, was the gleaming stream of water.

Ted was filled with renewed confidence. The sweetness and freshness of the morning air stimulated him.

Bapo joined him.

"A glorious morning, Bapo," cried Ted. "We mustn't waste it. I'm keen to be in the air again. Go and get that empty can we raked up last night and bring a coil of rope."

Bapo obeyed while Ted studied the rocks and bushes that would have to be relied on for aid in getting down to the brook.

Fastening the long coil of thin rope to the can, Ted thrust the other end of the rope into the Mexican's hand.

"This is your job, Bapo," he explained. "I'll climb down the side of the cliff—it doesn't seem such an impossible thing with all those bushes to hold to—and you let the can down after me. I'll fill the can and you draw it up when I give the word. I'll drink all I can hold down there, and you drink from the can when you draw it up. Then let it down again and we'll fill it up to last us through the day."

"Si, señor," answered Bapo. "But eet ees you who risk your life while I stay here safe on the ledge."

"Oh, I feel like having a little morning exer-

cise," replied Ted. "It's good for one's health. Anyway, I guess there isn't much danger if I'm careful."

Ted lowered himself carefully over the brink, feeling for a toehold in the slippery rock.

The toehold was not hard to find; his hand groped for and found a clump of tough shrubs growing among the rocks. So the arduous descent began.

The water can bumped along from rock to rock close to him, telling that Bapo was doing his part. When Ted Scott reached an outjutting rock that afforded him a fairly good footing he reached for the rope and fastened it beneath his shoulders with the can hanging at his back.

"This shows almost human intelligence," he thought, with a grin. "Wonder I didn't think of it before."

It was not long before he had cause to congratulate himself upon his foresight. His foot slipped on a treacherous bit of moss, and at the same time the tough creeper to which he was holding came out by the roots. But the rope, held taut by the wiry Mexican, gave the young aviator just the support that he needed until he could get a new toehold in another crevice in the rock, clinging meanwhile by his hands to anything that came within his reach.

Ted Scott looked below and congratulated himself that the rope—and Juan Bapo—had held.

"Those rocks down there don't look like a particularly soft bed," he muttered to himself. Again and again he was forced to rest and ease his stretched muscles before he resumed his downward journey.

Now he was far enough down to catch the sound of the water as it rushed boisterously over its pebbly bed. The sound was music to his ears. He licked his parched lips, soon to be cooled with delicious draughts.

Down he went until he felt his foot strike on solid ground. The descent at least had been made in safety.

But had it?

As Ted stepped backward, tugging at the fastening of the rope, something moving caught his eye.

He stopped, transfixed with sudden dread.

Upon a rock not five feet from him a rattlesnake coiled itself, the hideous head raised to strike!

## CHAPTER XVI

### Quick Action

With forked tongue shooting viciously from between gaping jaws, the rattler struck.

But its target had moved. Quickly, Ted Scott had thrown himself to one side. The hideous, slimy body grazed his hair as it shot past him.

Simultaneously with that lightning-like movement, Ted had grabbed his revolver. The snake recoiled itself, rattling horribly. The tongue darted menace, the eyes looked death.

But that instant of reprieve had been all that Ted Scott needed. He braced himself, took careful aim, and fired. A second report shattered the stillness, sending echoes among the mountains. The body of the snake writhed upon the ground. Its head had been shot off.

A shout came from above.

"What is it, señor?" cried Bapo, in great anxiety. "What for you shoot?"

"It's all right, Bapo," Ted shouted back re-

assuringly. "Got a rattler before it got me. Everything's well. Don't worry."

The incident had served to put Ted on his guard. Where there was one rattlesnake there might well be others. He searched every foot of ground, every suspicious-looking crevice as he advanced toward the bank of the stream.

He reached it, however, without further mishap, knelt down and drank of it thirstily until he had had his fill. Never had draught seemed more delicious. Then he dipped the can and filled it to the brim. He returned with it to the foot of the cliff and fastened it to the dangling end of the rope, glancing up to see that Bapo was at his post.

The Mexican was leaning over the edge, watching him. Ted waved his hand as a signal, and the can began to ascend.

Great care had to be used lest the can bump against obstacles and the water spill, so that the process was necessarily slow. Ted employed the intervening time by stripping off his clothes and throwing himself into the stream. It gave him new life, and when he emerged he felt that he was ready for anything.

After Bapo had drunk his fill the can was let down again and refilled to serve as a store for the day. Bapo drew it up, detached the rope

and let it down to assist Ted in his climb.

The climb was harder than the descent had been, and Ted was almost exhausted when he reached the top.

"You look as though you had gained weight, Bapo," he said, with a smile.

"Eet ees the water," grinned Bapo, patting his distended stomach with great satisfaction. "I drink and drink till I can drink no more. But the shot," he went on, "eet afright me much. I think that maybe Mendez or some of hees men be there."

"No," answered Ted, "it was another kind of snake. I had to act pretty quickly. Another second and the thing would have got me."

"The señor has a charm to hees life," declared Bapo soberly. "He cannot be keeled."

"I wouldn't gamble on that," answered Ted. "I may go when I least expect it. But now we must get ready for our flight. Wish we had something to eat, but the water will help us out."

If the landing had been perilous, the take-off promised to equal it in danger. The young aviator did not minimize the possibilities for disaster attending a take-off from as limited a space as the ledge on which they had spent the night. The *Silver Streak* must gather speed enough to lift her into the air before she

reached the edge. Otherwise—but Ted refused to consider that angle. The chance had to be taken.

He and Bapo turned the plane about.

Bapo noted the brief runway and shrugged his shoulders. He said no word, however, as he climbed into his seat.

Ted had noted the shrug.

"Don't like the outlook, Bapo?" he asked, with a smile.

"Eet ees dangerous," answered Bapo gravely. "But the señor is an airman like there ees no other. He landed here. He will get away from here. Bapo ees not afraid."

Ted was touched by this profound confidence.

"You're a brave man, Bapo," he said. "I'm glad I have you with me." This tribute Bapo stored away in his simple heart to remember forever. How proud his wife would be when he told her what the famous Señor Scott had said! With what awe and admiration his ten children would look upon their father! And his comrades in the city! Ah, they would have the envy! Bapo straightened up in his seat. At that moment he would not have changed places with any one on earth.

Ted Scott thoughtfully regarded the limited —all too limited—stretch of ledge which was ahead of him.

"Luckily, the *Silver Streak* can pick up speed quickly," he thought. "Well, we'll see. I hope Charity is praying."

He started the motor and jumped into his seat. The straining engine broke into a roar and the plane leaped ahead. On and on it went, faster and faster.

When within a hundred feet of the edge of the cliff Ted tried to lift the plane into the air. Failure!

On it went like a meteor until only ten feet intervened between the flying plane and the precipice. Again Ted tried. This time the *Silver Streak* trembled, seemed to call upon all its buoyancy, and then soared upward just as the ground slipped from beneath the wheels.

Ted's heart gave a jubilant bound.

"There never was a ship like her!" he shouted aloud. "Not one plane in a thousand could manage a take-off like that! Glory hallelujah!"

The young pilot glanced in his mirror to see how Bapo had taken it. On that man's countenance was a look of seraphic bliss. He would again see his wife and ten children. His eyes were closed in beatific calm and his lips were moving rapidly—vowing, Ted thought, more candles than he could afford to burn before the shrine of his favorite saint.

For several hours the sun shone brightly and

the plane made rapid progress. But Ted Scott had already learned something about the fickleness of Mexican weather, so he was not surprised, though considerably chagrined, when he noticed heavy banks of clouds gathering on the horizon.

He pulled the stick and the plane shot upward. He would try to avoid the storm by flying above the clouds. Perhaps with luck he might be able to pass through the threatened area altogether before the storm broke.

Above the clouds the aviator looked down upon solid black banks. At times the mass was rent with vivid streaks of lightning. The thunder was rumbling like distant artillery.

"Looks as though it might get a lot worse before it gets better," thought Ted. "I'm afraid we're in for it all right."

Another series of jagged flashes seemed to confirm the impression. For a moment the heavens seemed to have burst wide open, to have split across. The thunder now was close and deafening.

The young pilot tried for more altitude but found such a gale blowing at the higher levels that he was forced to descend again.

"Not so good," muttered Ted to himself. "I might try flying beneath the storm, but there I'd get the rain and be in more danger from the lightning. I'll have to grope my way

through this murk somehow and trust to luck that it's only a shower; one of these mountain storms that are pretty bad while they last but don't last long."

Suddenly Ted struck one of those air pockets dreaded by all aviators. The plane dropped like a plummet, was whirled about in dizzy gyrations, and then began to rear and plunge like a maddened horse.

Ted brought her safely into a normal airway, but all nonchalance was gone from his attitude. He settled down for a grim battle with the elements.

Lightning played about the plane, threatening it at every second with demolition. Ted had already learned to his cost what lightning could do. He did not want another demonstration.

The earth below was blotted out completely. For his direction he was forced to rely entirely upon his instruments.

To his dismay, as he glanced at the board, he found that the compass was acting in an eccentric manner. The indicator no longer pointed steadily north, but was jumping about spasmodically to any of the four points of the compass.

There was no doubt in Ted's mind that the lightning had in some way affected the delicate instrument. But this assurance did noth-

ing to mitigate the serious nature of their predicament.

The sight of the sun was of course denied him, and the wind had whipped the plane about so that he did not know in the least the direction in which it was moving.

It was exasperating beyond measure to feel that, for all he knew, he might be going in absolutely an opposite direction from that which he desired.

Lost in the storm! And among these mountains! And with every hour their supply of gas getting lower! And with his compass for the time out of commission!

For a full hour longer the plane flew aimlessly. At last the storm abated. The clouds were rifted and a pale and watery sun looked through.

Never to Ted had the sun been so welcome. Beneath him the territory was plainly visible, every peak and gorge being clearly defined.

But while the sun could give him the general direction, could give him the difference between north and south and east and west, it was only vaguely helpful. It might lead him in the general direction of the fastnesses of Copenez, but there was no assurance that he might not pass his destination by a hundred miles or more on one side or the other. He must have something more definite than that.

That something must be furnished by Bapo. The latter was supposed to be reasonably familiar with the country. Ted had gathered from their conversations that Bapo had flown over this section more than once in connection with his work for the Mexican Government.

This was strictly true, but one mountain looks very much like another, and a full year had passed since Bapo had been in this wild country. There were certain landmarks that he was familiar with, but, lacking these, he was quite as likely to become as bewildered as any one else.

There was, to be sure, the map that Ted had brought with him. But he had already learned that this was unreliable. It seemed to have been compiled from hearsay to a large extent, and a dozen times in the course of this journey it had proved vague or positively incorrect.

Ted scribbled a note and passed it through the tube to his helper.

"Am going to get down as low as I dare," Ted had written, "and I want you to study the country and see if you can tell me where we are and the direction in which we ought to go."

Bapo nodded and applied himself to the work. Ted flew about in wide circles so as to embrace a large extent of territory. Now and then he glanced over his shoulder at Bapo, but each time the Mexican shook his head. The

country was strange to him. He seemed to have lost his bearings completely.

Despite his impatience, Ted maintained his stoic calm as far as appearance was concerned. Bapo was doing his best. There was nothing to be gained by fretting.

Remorselessly the hours stole away while the flyers were engaged in a quest that seemed fruitless. The thought of another night spent in the wilderness was intolerable. Then, too, they were using the precious gas to no purpose.

Ted tapped his tank. It was dangerously low. If he were forced to descend and could not replenish his supplies, his mission would have ended in failure. Not only that, but he and Bapo would be in imminent danger of hunger and privation. And if Mendez and his followers should happen along—well, that was something that Ted did not care to contemplate.

Ted sent a message through the tube:

"Tell me what special landmark you are looking for, Bapo, and perhaps I may see it, even if you miss it."

"Eet ees three mountain peaks, señor, that make the form of a triangle. Eef I could see those, I would know where we are," was Bapo's reply.

Ted swept about in a still wider circle look-

ing for those three points of a triangle that might prove their salvation.

Sometimes, by straining a point, Ted imagined he saw some summits that might suggest the geometric figure in question, but on pointing them out to Bapo he was met with a disconsolate shake of the head in the negative.

He soared still higher where he could get a wider view and brought his glasses into play. Slowly he swept the horizon. Then his heart leaped as he saw the objects of which he was in search.

There, clearly outlined, were three towering peaks that bore an undeniable suggestion of a triangle.

He turned the nose of the plane in that direction and was soon hovering directly above them.

He felt a hand on his shoulder and heard Bapo's voice shouting joyously in his ear:

"You have found theem, señor! Now Bapo knows where he ees. Turn the plane a leetle east by north and we weell be on the road to Quesaba."

## CHAPTER XVII

### In the Toils

Ted Scott shaped his course along the line indicated by Bapo and sent the *Silver Streak* hurtling at the top of its speed through the air.

One difficulty had been surmounted, but another remained. So much time had been spent in the quest for direction that the gas was lowering to the danger point.

Ted tested it and found things worse even than he had feared. At a liberal calculation the gas would not last for more than two hours, perhaps not more than an hour and a half.

He sent a message to Bapo that read:

"How far is it from here to Quesaba? Tell me as exactly as you can."

In the glass Ted could see that Bapo was rubbing his forehead in perplexity. The young aviator knew that in that indolent, happy-go-lucky country guesswork largely took the place of exactness. Precision about anything was at a discount.

Bapo's answer at last came back:

"I am not sure, señor, but eef we have the luck we ought to make eet in three hours."

Ted's heart sank.

Three hours! And his gas would not last for more than two hours at the most.

Suppose he were forced down when within one flying hour of Quesaba! That hour represented a hundred miles or so of plane travel. But if he had to abandon his plane and cover that hundred miles on mule back, or perhaps on foot, it would be several days before he could reach the stronghold of Copenez.

And in that time the insurrection that the Mexican Government was trying so hard to prevent might have broken out! Then no one could tell what bloodshed would ensue before it was quelled.

And Ted's mission would have proved a failure! All the hopes that the American Ambassador and Valdez had cherished would be shattered. Hapworth, too, would have lost utterly what he had hoped to gain by Ted's errand, had it been successful.

One faint gleam of hope came to Ted. If he were really approaching the capital of Copenez, there must be other towns of considerable size in the province over which he ruled. And if so, one of those towns might be large enough, have automobiles enough, to have a filling station where he could find gasoline. It

would probably not be of the quality that he preferred for airplane work, but it would do on a pinch, and this was no time to stick at trifles.

He sent a note through the tube to Bapo, which read:

"We are running out of gas. If Quesaba is as far off as you say, we shall not be able to reach there on what gas we have. Think hard, Bapo. Is there any town this side of Quesaba where we may be able to get gas?"

That Bapo indeed had to think hard was proved by the length of time he took for his reply. It came at last, however, and was of this purport:

"They ees a town call Tolura, not so beeg as Quesaba and maybe a hundred miles thees side. Every place so beeg as that in thees country has some automobeels and there moost be the gas to run theem. Eet will be well to stop there maybe, yes?"

Ted's answer went back promptly:

"You bet we'll stop there! We've got to! Are we on the right road to get there?"

Bapo replied:

"Yes, señor. We have to pass over Tolura to get to Quesaba. I know eet when we come to eet. There ees a reever. Eet empty into a lake, beeg lake. When we reach the reever we are not far from Tolura."

Ted's heart was somewhat lightened as the result of this interchange. If he could indeed find gas at Tolura, he would be able to replenish his supply and still reach the capital of Copenez before nightfall.

He was further encouraged by the fact that the wind which had been blowing most of the time in his face, changed direction and came almost directly from the rear. This enabled the young pilot to accelerate considerably the speed of the *Silver Streak.*

Another hour passed. Ted felt as if he were getting cross-eyed as he kept one eye on the indicator of his tank and the other on the scene ahead.

One cause of apprehension had left him for the time. They had passed one range of mountains and were flying now over comparatively level country.

Twenty miles away another range lifted its towering peaks into the air. Beyond that must lie the stronghold of Copenez, the longed-for city of Quesaba.

But the young aviator knew that he could not pass that last barrier until he had replenished his supply of gas. And since that was so, it was at least some boon of fortune that he was over country where he could make a safe landing.

A few minutes more passed and then Ted

Scott knew that the limit was being reached. His tank was nearly dry. Already the starved engine was beginning to cough and miss.

A long way off could be seen the spire of a church. That must mark the site of Tolura. But with a sinking of the heart Ted realized that he could not get even that far.

He would have to come down this side of it, and then by some means, a horse if he could find one, on foot if he could not, reach the town and secure some vehicle to bring back a supply of gas, if that precious fluid was really there.

With anxious eyes he searched the ground for a suitable landing place. Bapo was also looking with desperate eagerness.

They both discovered the desired spot at the same moment. A level plateau, green and tempting, stretched out beneath them—an ideal landing place, the best that Ted had seen since the start of his flight.

He glanced in the mirror and saw that Bapo was gesticulating eagerly. Ted grinned and nodded reassuringly.

"Wonder if he thought I'd overlook a bet like that," he chuckled. "Such a chance!"

Ted swung about in spirals on his last gallon of gas and prepared to land.

Then he caught sight of something that narrowed his eyes and caused him to draw a sharp breath. To one side of the level space, hidden

among shrubbery and dwarfed trees, were grouped a considerable number of men.

Naturally, from that distance the character of the band could not be told. But for all that, Ted had a premonition that their presence there boded no good. A wandering band of rebels possibly; perhaps another group of brigands like that headed by Mendez.

As Ted dropped lower he saw that the men below were eying the plane with excited eagerness. They watched him, waited for him, would probably surround the *Silver Streak* as soon as it touched the ground.

But there was no alternative. If a landing was not made voluntarily, the plane would soon crash with Ted and Bapo to the earth. They must land and take their chance on the kind of greeting they might receive.

After all, Ted told himself, these men might prove friendly. Certainly they could have no fear of him, seeing that they outnumbered him so overwhelmingly. At any rate there was no danger of a hasty shot until they learned of his errand. Perhaps they were adherents of Copenez. Indeed, that individual himself might be with them. In that case, his errand would be accomplished more quickly than he had dared hope. He could deliver his message, replenish his fuel supply, and set off on his journey back to the Mexican capital.

He was close to the plateau now. The roar of his engine battered against the mountains he had just left and was flung back to him in a deafening reverberation.

He could no longer see the hidden men, but guessed that they were getting ready to close in on the plane.

The *Silver Streak* touched the earth gently, bounded slightly upward, and then settled into a smooth run.

The men instantly broke from cover and ran toward the plane. Several reached it, others darted in front as though to halt it. Ted shouted a warning.

"Watch out there!" he yelled. "Want to be run down?"

The men drew back out of the path of the slowing plane. One of them was just a second too late. The edge of one of the wings struck him, hurling him to the ground.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### Gathering Clouds

The man who had been struck by a wing of the *Silver Streak* remained motionless. With a sinking of the heart Ted Scott hoped he was not dead.

Such a tragedy, due to no fault of his, would be an inauspicious incident at this moment when of all others he needed a friendly reception.

He drew the plane to a standstill and jumped to the ground. Scarcely had his foot touched the earth before he was surrounded by angry, wildly gesticulating men.

Two or three stepped toward him menacingly, as though contemplating physical violence. But a man who was evidently their leader interposed.

"Back!" he commanded. "You forget that we do nothing except at command of Manuel Copenez."

Ted caught the name. He turned quickly to the speaker.

"Copenez!" he exclaimed. "You serve under him?" he asked in rather halting Spanish.

The man noticed his difficulty and replied:

"I speak English." He drew himself up haughtily. He was short and stout and was dressed in a rather gaudy uniform. But an air of command made up for his lack of stature. As he stood facing Ted, a scowl on his dark face, he looked like a man to be reckoned with, one whose favor might be valuable and his enmity dangerous.

"I am Rudolfo Ruffo, second in command to the great Copenez," he announced impressively.

"I'm certainly glad to meet you," said Ted, with undisguised relief. "I have come a long way to see your leader. If you will take me to him, I will deem it a great favor."

The man looked slightly nonplussed. He continued to regard Ted with no relaxing of his scowl.

"You say you have come a long way to meet Manuel Copenez," he said. "But you will first tell me who you are and why you have come."

"Seems to have a mighty big opinion of himself," Ted thought.

Aloud he said:

"My name is Scott. I am an American from the States. I come with an important message to your leader. What that message is I am

pledged to reveal only to him. I am sure that it will save time and needless explanations if you will take me to him at once."

Ruffo made no answer. He favored Ted with a look of deep suspicion and then withdrew to hold converse with other members of his band.

Ted was immensely relieved to see that the man who had been knocked over by the plane had apparently recovered and had joined the group.

A low hiss drew his attention to Bapo, who had been standing by him without saying a word.

"What is it, Bapo?" asked Ted, in a low tone.

"Rudolfo Ruffo is a cruel and dangerous man," whispered Bapo. "He is very different from Copenez, who, though he roars like a lion, has a heart that ees not wicked. Ruffo call heemself second to Copenez, but often eet ees thought by those that know such theengs that he ees first. Copenez still rules, but he grows old and Ruffo already begins to theenk heemself the master. Do not anger heem, señor, eef you weesh to live."

Ted Scott could not help thinking that perhaps Bapo took too gloomy a view of the situation. Personally, he was elated at the thought that his errand in this wild, unfriendly country was nearly done and that in a short time he

could start on his return trip to the capital.

He noticed that several men were crowding about the plane. To Ted's mystification, they appeared to be examining something within the fuselage. The raised furious voices and the looks directed toward him seemed full of evil significance.

He began to grow angry on his own account. He was getting irritated because of this unfriendliness for which there was no apparent cause.

He went toward the plane. The ring of men opened to let him pass within and then closed again upon him.

"Spy!" they shouted. "Enemy! He comes to search out our plans! Kill him! Hang him! Tear him to pieces!"

They surged about the aviator and it seemed for a moment that they were going to put their threats into immediate execution.

Again it was the man Ruffo who stayed them.

"Peace!" he thundered. "Back!"

At the tone and the look on his fierce face the men gave ground, cringing before him.

"You will do nothing till Rudolfo Ruffo gives the word. Meanwhile, have no fear. This man will be delivered to justice. He cannot escape."

By this time Ted was fairly boiling with wrath.

"I am no enemy," he cried, facing the mob without flinching. "I come here on a mission of peace and goodwill, and you call me a spy and hurl at me threats of death. What does it mean?" he demanded, addressing himself to Ruffo.

Ted Scott's look and bearing, the blazing anger in his eyes, evidently raised a doubt in the mind of the Mexican leader. Was it possible that he, Rudolfo Ruffo, was making a mistake? If so, it might go hard with him when Copenez should come upon the scene. Copenez did not admire men who made mistakes.

Ruffo stooped and seemed to study something in the fuselage. Then doubt left his face. The scowl returned. With an accusing finger he pointed to certain marks that had been scratched on the woodwork of the fuselage in a place not readily open to observation.

"You say that you are not an enemy," he thundered. "Yet you bear on your plane the symbol of a secret society that is the deadly foe of our great leader Copenez. How do you explain this—you, who call yourself a friend?"

In bewilderment Ted bent over those strange markings on the fuselage. He had never seen anything like them before. He did not know

how they had gotten there. He was completely at a loss.

He stooped closer to the markings, which were in the form of a triangle encompassed by a circle, conscious of the bitterly triumphant looks of Ruffo and his men. His mind worked rapidly, trying to find a way out of this wholly unforeseen difficulty. He did not wonder that it had aroused suspicion. Why was this symbol there unless he were hand in glove with the secret society it represented?

"Pardon, señor."

It was Bapo who spoke and now himself bent over the mysterious markings of the symbol. Ted watched him curiously and hopefully. Would Bapo be able to find the key to the enigma?

Bapo stood up. He and Ted exchanged looks, a look of surprise and dread on Bapo's part and of increased bewilderment on Ted's.

"Eet ees as Ruffo says," Bapo explained in a low voice to Ted. "These marks are the sign of a secret society that has great power and ees a known enemy to Manuel Copenez. Señor, you are in great danger."

## CHAPTER XIX

### Bound Hands

"But I did not put those markings on the fuselage," protested Ted Scott. "I haven't the slightest idea how they got there. You know that, Bapo."

"Yes, I know that, señor," said Bapo significantly. "But Rudolfo Ruffo do not know."

Bapo turned and, not without dignity of his own, approached the Mexican leader.

Ted Scott, leaning against the fuselage, busy with very unpleasant thoughts, could not hear what was passing between them. But he judged from their gestures that Bapo was trying to explain. It became increasingly evident to Ted that he was not succeeding in this effort.

Abruptly, Ruffo pushed Bapo aside and strode toward the plane. He gestured to his men and they pressed forward eagerly.

"Search this plane," he ordered, "and see that you do it well. Upon what you will find may depend the life or the death of this stranger."

As the men swarmed over his beloved plane, Ted started to make a wrathful protest. It was Bapo again who cautioned silence.

"We cannot prevent them, señor," he pointed out. "They will have their will whether we like eet or not, and thees Ruffo would perhaps be glad if we gave heem an excuse so he could keell us. They are too many for us."

The truth of this was obvious. Ted could only clench his hands and grind his teeth and hope that the Mexicans would not find the secret compartment in which he had hidden the precious papers. He had pledged himself to deliver these papers only into the hands of Manuel Copenez himself. He dreaded having them fall into the hands of Ruffo, whom he distrusted.

Suppose they did not meet with Ruffo's views? Suppose his own ambitions led him to desire the insurrection, thinking it would advance his private fortunes? What would be easier than to destroy the papers and then put the two aviators out of the way?

The hidden compartment continued to guard its secret. Though the plane was searched with thoroughness, Ruffo's men found nothing. Certainly there was no evidence to confirm them in their suspicion that Ted Scott was an enemy and a spy.

Still, the mysterious marks on the fuselage

seemed to be evidence enough. They were highly suspicious. They seemed to indicate that there was some connection between Ted and that secret society that hated Copenez. Ted himself had to admit that Ruffo was not wholly to blame in thinking so.

The unfruitful search did little to placate Ruffo. He directed that the hands of Ted and Bapo should be bound and that the two aviators be lifted to the backs of mules. Resistance to the indignity would have been foolish, and they had to submit.

"How about my plane?" protested Ted. "Are you going to leave it here?"

"It will be well taken care of," replied Ruffo. "I will leave a guard of my men with it. Afterward it will be of use to us in our army."

The calm finality with which this was said made Ted Scott's fingers itch to get at the fellow's throat. Not only was the thought of losing his plane intolerable, but there was a sinister significance in the suggestion that Ted would have no further use for it. Dead men cannot fly planes!

Ruffo drew several of his men aside and appeared to be giving them directions regarding the *Silver Streak*. Then the rest of the company mounted and started with their prisoners toward the mountains.

Ted wondered whether they were going to

Quesaba, the capital of the province. That place must be at least a hundred miles away and it would take several days to reach it. He fumed with impatience.

But Bapo, who had gathered much from the conversation of Ruffo's followers, enlightened him on this point.

"They are going to Aleriva, señor," he said. "That ees maybe fifteen miles from here. Eet ees there that Copenez has hees what you Americanos call hees headquarters."

This was comforting. If Copenez were only fifteen miles away, it would not be long before Ted would see him face to face. He imagined the indignation of the leader when he learned how Ted had been maltreated. He would order the bonds to be removed and Ruffo would receive a reprimand that would make his ears burn.

With his hands bound in front of him, jolting along over the dried bed of a stream or a rock-strewn trail where the mules found their footing precarious, Ted Scott brooded over the hard luck that had dogged him from the very start of his journey. Bapo had said that in his country luck was a necessary commodity, and Ted was inclined to agree with him.

His thoughts swung back to those mysterious markings on the plane. How had they got there? Who had put them there—and why?

The question brought him inevitably to the rascals who had tampered with the plane in Mexico City. He had repaired the damages to the struts and other parts, but this scrawl had escaped his notice. They might have been put there at the time the other vandalism had been committed.

Could it be that, in spite of the secrecy used, the scoundrels had learned through underground channels or guessed that he was on a mission to Copenez? If so, knowing the enmity between Copenez and the secret society in question, they might have counted on the sight of those symbols to rouse the wrath and suspicion of Copenez and ruin Ted's mission.

This was of course mere conjecture, but the more he thought of it the more inclined the young aviator was to favor this solution. They were the only enemies he knew of in Mexico.

"How pleased those fellows would be if they could see me now," Ted muttered moodily. "If they've done this, I'll get even with them yet, if it's the last thing I do."

After hours of traveling, the whole band halted in the middle of a shallow stream to water their horses and mules.

Bapo, who was riding next to Ted, took the opportunity to whisper:

"We are nearly there, señor. Aleriva is not more than a mile away."

"Good!" replied Ted. "I'll be mighty glad to get down off this old rack of bones."

The order to march was given and they straggled on again.

Ted began to look about him with a more alert interest. After all, he was approaching the goal he had set himself, even if he were reaching it in a rather irregular way. Within the hour it was possible that he would meet Copenez himself.

But would this be the end of his troubles? Uncomfortably the remark of Hapworth again recurred to him about Copenez being of the kind that shot first and asked questions afterward.

Some time later the company, emerging from a narrow trail that wound its precipitous way up the side of a mountain, straggled into a courtyard, baking in the heat of the sun, and at a word from Ruffo halted.

A Mexican detached himself from the group surrounding Ruffo and came toward Ted.

"Get down," the man commanded curtly.

## CHAPTER XX

### Behind Prison Bars

Ted Scott obeyed the Mexican's command with difficulty. He was stiff from those hours in the saddle and sore in mind as in body.

The first Mexican was joined by a second, and between them the aviator was marched off to a grim, frowning building on the further side of the courtyard.

The men led him into a small passage. It was cool and dark, and after the blistering heat of the sun Ted's first sensation was one of relief. He realized that he was parched with thirst.

The passage seemed incredibly long.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked of the men in Spanish.

One of them made no answer. The other merely grunted. The latter paused before a low door and fitted a key in a lock. The door opened creakingly.

Ted turned once more to the men.

"I must see your leader, Manuel Copenez,"

he said. "I must see him at once. If either of you will help me I think I can promise to make it worth your while."

For answer, one of the men pointed to the open door.

The other said in a menacing tone:

"We do not bargain with spies. We hang them."

After that portentous remark Ted was invited with ironical politeness to pass through the door. He heard it slammed behind him. The key grated in the lock. Ted Scott had to fight to control a rising sense of futile anger at the predicament in which he found himself.

He did not yet imagine that his life was actually in danger. He still clung to the belief that it only required a meeting with Copenez to define his position and set him right in the eyes of his half-barbaric captors.

Surely, thought Ted, as soon as the chief should set eyes upon the papers intrusted to his care, he would realize that the man who had dropped from the skies into the hands of his men was not a spy, but an ambassador of peace. There would be apologies, expressions of mutual respect and trust, and then Ted could broach the main object of his mission.

But in the meantime, where was Copenez?

Ted paced the floor of his prison, hands thrust deep into his pockets.

He suffered the deepest anxiety as he thought of his beloved plane. What would they do with it? Ignorant handling of the delicate machinery, even without malign purpose, might injure it seriously.

Suppose they should find the secret compartment and the papers that had been intrusted to him! If Rudolfo was the conscienceless ruffian that Bapo had made him out to be, he might —if he really wanted a revolution to break out —destroy the papers and say that Ted's story was false, that he had no papers and had merely come on a spying expedition. That perhaps might put Ted Scott up in front of a firing squad. What would a single life, and the life of an "Americano" at that, be to Ruffo? Absolutely nothing.

Striving to banish such bitter thoughts, Ted took a more careful look at his prison.

It was a small cell. The floor was hardened dirt, the walls looked like stone but were not stone. Ted wondered if it would not be possible to dig his way to freedom, given time enough. He did not believe that his imprisonment would be of indefinite duration, however, so dismissed the thought from his mind.

Next he examined the window. It was a rather large window, large enough to permit the passage of a much bulkier form than Ted's. But it was guarded by massive iron bars. Ted

grasped them and found them as real and tough as they looked.

The rasp of a key in the lock caused Ted to whirl around to face the door.

It opened slowly and Ted watched with eagerness. Was the elusive Copenez at last about to put in an appearance?

His hopes sank as Juan Bapo appeared. Guards thrust him in unceremoniously and the door grated shut behind him. Once more the rasp of the key in the lock could be heard.

Bapo and Ted confronted each other. Ted grinned—rather wryly, to be sure—and with a sweeping wave of his hand indicated his cramped quarters.

"Welcome!" he said. "If it's true that misery loves company, then I should be mighty glad to see you, Bapo. Only not here," he added, his smile fading. "I hoped that you'd had better luck than I, old boy. I thought that perhaps you had escaped."

"Escaped!" muttered Bapo.

He sat down on one of the two narrow benches that must serve as seats in the daytime and beds at night, and took his head in his hands. He was a picture of utter dejection.

"Escape!" he repeated, looking up at Ted. "You do not know what you say, señor. Eet ees imposseeble to escape from thees place."

"Is it so well guarded?" asked Ted.

Bapo shrugged.

"There are guards everywhere, guards who are told to shoot to keell. Even eef eet were posseeble to get outside these walls they would catch and keell us in the mountains."

There was something in the way the statement was made that impressed Ted. Still, he could not understand Bapo's attitude of deep despair. It seemed to him that it was out of all proportion to their predicament.

"Cheer up, Juan," he said. "There's no use giving up the ship till she's sunk, you know."

"You do not know thees country, señor," Bapo went on, staring gloomily at the floor. "Me, I know eet well. Also I know of Rudolfo Ruffo that he is a man without a heart."

"But it is not with this Ruffo that we have to deal," Ted interrupted impatiently. "Certainly I understood in Mexico City that Copenez was the rebel leader, not Rudolfo Ruffo."

"That ees true, señor," agreed Bapo, without looking up. "But Copenez ees not here."

Ted started violently.

## CHAPTER XXI

### Startling News

"Copenez not here?" exclaimed Ted Scott in response to Bapo's statement, halting in his restless pacing about his prison. "How do you know?"

"They tell me, señor," responded Bapo, "that the great Copenez has ridden in the hills with a company of men. No one knows for sure when he weell be back. One day, two days, perhaps three days—who can tell? And while we wait," he added slowly, with a significance that Ted understood, "you and me, we are in the hands of Rudolfo Ruffo."

Ted paused before the Mexican and stood for a moment in concentrated thought.

"Let's get this straight, Bapo," he said. "Copenez, unfortunately for us, is away and may not return for an indefinite time. In the meantime Ruffo is in command here. And he is a dangerous man, already prejudiced against us. Tell me frankly, Bapo. What do you think is apt to happen to us?"

Bapo looked at the tall young aviator. His eyes were brooding, his face sombre.

"I theenk, señor," said Bapo slowly, "that what weell happen to us weell be death."

"But, why?" asked Ted. "Ruffo will not dare! If he did, he would have to answer for it to Copenez. And if what I've heard of Copenez's fiery temper is true, Ruffo would have a hard time explaining why he did not wait for his leader's word before he killed a messenger from the Mexican Government."

"That would be easy," returned Bapo. "Ruffo ees a cunning man. He would say that you tried to keell heem and he had to keell you to save hees own life. Or he would say that you were shot while you were trying to escape from thees prison. There are many theengs that he might say. And when Copenez see the marks of the secret society on the plane, maybe he say that Ruffo do what you Americanos call the good job."

"But why should Ruffo want to kill us?" asked Ted. "He can't have any personal feeling against us, for we haven't done him any harm. What is there in it for him whether we live or die? Why should he try to keep me from giving my message to Copenez?"

"Bapo hear many theengs that the men say while we ride to-day," returned the Mexican. "They say that Copenez do not know whether

he want to fight with the government or not. One day he theenks yes, another he theenks no. One day he ees hot, the next day he ees cold. But Ruffo he wants to fight, he wants the revolution. He theenk he make much money, get plenty loot. Then he can slip away with much gold to some other country. And he tell hees men that there weell be much loot for everybody."

Ted Scott pondered this information. If true, it went far toward clearing up the mystery of Ruffo's hostile reception. Ted had said to the crowd that surrounded the plane that he came on a mission of peace and goodwill. But peace and goodwill were just what Rudolfo Ruffo did not want. Peace meant nothing to him except a dull, monotonous, ill-paid existence. But revolution meant a chance for him to line his pockets. Ted's coming threatened to kill that chance. Ruffo's interest lay in getting the messenger from Valdez out of the way. Of course that meant Bapo, too, on the principle that dead men tell no tales.

From the windows of his prison he watched the doings in the courtyard. He saw that men gathered there daily and engaged in excited conversation.

Each day the features of the men became more glowering, their gestures more significant. Something was brewing. The young

aviator felt that he was on the edge of a volcano. At any moment there might be a terrible eruption.

Hopeful at first of prompt release, Ted gradually lost that hope. His only chance lay with Copenez. Why did the leader so long delay his coming? Unless he came very soon, Ted felt that he and Bapo were doomed.

Time and again during those days he tried to devise some way of escape from prison. But the walls were thick, the bars strong, the door massive and strongly bolted. He had no tools and no way of procuring any.

Twice daily, food was brought to them. At first Ted nourished some hope of overpowering the man who brought it and of making a desperate dash for freedom. This was made impossible, however, by the fact that while one man brought in the food two others stood guard inside the door, pistols cocked and ready for action.

Ted wondered why Ruffo himself had not come to see him, to taunt him, if for nothing else. But the man stayed away from the cell and kept himself sedulously in the background. What his motive was in doing this, Ted could only surmise.

Presently the daily meetings in the courtyard seemed to be taking on the character of mob demonstrations. From the window of their

prison, the aviators could see that the men were getting out of hand. Ted felt sure that Ruffo was really inciting them to violence, but that as a matter of form and for the purpose of providing an alibi later on, he pretended to be trying to restrain them.

Five days passed. On the evening of the fifth Ted Scott saw a sight that turned his heart cold within him.

A crowd had gathered. It was an ominous crowd, black-browed and threatening. It surged ever closer to the prison. Ted was reminded of the steady, resistless movement of a tide sweeping shoreward.

A horseman galloped up to the crowd, which opened to receive him. Ted saw the fellow fling his hands above his head. From one hand dangled a long rope.

Ted heard the sound of a sharply indrawn breath at his shoulder. He turned to find Bapo close beside him.

"It is the end, señor," said the Mexican. "To-night we die!"

## CHAPTER XXII

### A Dash for Freedom

Ted Scott turned squarely to the Mexican. His young face was set and grave, but his bearing was erect and there was indomitable courage in every line of him.

"It may be that you are right, Bapo," he said. "We've been pretty good friends, haven't we?" thrusting out his hand. "Shall we say good-by before they come for us?"

Bapo put out his hand and grasped Ted's.

"Adios, señor," he said. "Si, we have been good friends."

There was a noise at the door. The prisoners turned. Each in his own way—the young idol of the American people, the humble Mexican—faced death with courage.

The door swung wide. In the aperture stood Rudolfo Ruffo. Behind him were guards who eyed the sentenced men with fierce eagerness.

"Señor Ruffo!" With calm effrontery Ted swept the Mexican leader a low bow. "This is an unexpected honor. I have wondered why

you stayed away from us for so long. We have poor accommodations for such a distinguished visitor, but if you will make allowance for them," and he motioned Ruffo to a seat.

Ruffo scowled angrily. From his belt he drew forth an ugly-looking weapon.

"Spy!" he cried. "My people hunger to see you swing from the branch of a tree. But if you mock me, dog, I may be tempted to cheat them of their vengeance."

He tapped the gun suggestively.

"Ah, yes," said Ted serenely. "I notice that you speak of these people in the courtyard as your people. I thought that they were under the rule of Copenez."

Ruffo looked uneasily at the guards who had accompanied him. He motioned them to the door.

"Wait outside," he commanded. "I will call you when I am ready for you."

The men obeyed, closing the door after them.

Ruffo turned truculently to Ted.

"Copenez *was* the ruler," he said, laying a significant emphasis on the past tense.

"You mean that you have replaced him?" asked Ted.

Again Ruffo looked about as though to make sure that there were no listeners.

"I did not say so."

"Then is he dead?"

"He may be," returned Ruffo vaguely. "It is many days since he set out and there was but a small band with him. He may have been ambushed. But why do I bandy words with you? I am in command here now and my word is law."

"I am glad to hear you speak of law," said Ted, who was desperately playing for time. "You are a soldier. Is there not a military law that even a man accused of being a spy shall have a trial before he is condemned?"

"I have tried and condemned you," replied Ruffo grandiloquently.

"Without giving me a chance to be heard in my defense," Ted reminded him.

"The mark of the enemy society on the plane is evidence enough."

"On the contrary, it is no evidence at all," returned Ted. "I know nothing about how the mark came there. I did not even know that there was any such society in existence. Some one has put that mark there to arouse your suspicions and ruin my mission to Copenez. Not even a dog ought to hang on evidence like that."

"You speak of your mission to Copenez," said Ruffo, scowling darkly. "What was that mission?"

"I cannot tell you," replied Ted quietly.

"You mean you will not," flared Ruffo.

"I mean I cannot," declared Ted. "I have given my word that my message shall be communicated to none but Copenez."

"Have you papers, documents?" asked Ruffo.

"Yes," replied Ted.

"Where are they?" asked Ruffo. "You have been searched. They are not on your person. They are not in your plane. Tell me quickly. Where are they?"

Ted remained silent.

"Ah, you will not speak!" exclaimed Ruffo malignantly. "But we have ways of making one speak. Yes, there are ways. Splinters thrust under finger nails and set on fire are good. Pulling the nails out by the roots is good. Stripping a man and placing him bound on an ant hill I have sometimes found very effective. It is astonishing how it cures the dumb."

Ted disdained to make any reply.

"But, alas, I have no time for that," went on Ruffo regretfully. "And I can guess your mission. You came to make peace between Copenez and the Government at Mexico City. You came to stop the revolution, to wheedle Copenez with soft words and lying promises. It is that, I know."

Still Ted remained silent.

The tumult in the courtyard grew louder

and more menacing. It penetrated the prison walls like the low muttering of thunder.

"My people grow impatient," said Ruffo. "They want to see the spy hung."

"Why do they want to?" asked Ted. "They don't care a straw one way or the other, or they wouldn't if you hadn't stirred them up to it. This work is yours, Ruffo. You want to have me dead and out of the way before Copenez returns."

The shaft went home and Ruffo grew pale with fury.

"Dog!" he thundered. "Do you dare to speak like this to me? For less than that I should send a bullet through your heart."

"Go ahead," replied Ted coolly. "I'd as soon be shot as hung. Rather, for that matter. However, before you hand me over to your gang, Ruffo, I want one more word with you."

Ruffo hesitated. Then he said gruffly:

"Speak, but be brief. My people will not wait."

"You seem to forget," Ted said, "that I too have people. The United States of America is a great and powerful country, Ruffo. It has a long arm that can stretch to the end of the world. Have you thought what will happen to you when word reaches the United States of the way you have murdered one of its citizens?"

Ruffo smiled, a wolf's smile.

"Your country is a long way off, señor," he said in a silky voice. "Your people will not know. No one will know. You will disappear —puff—like a breath of air. They will ask—yes. They will not find out. Then they will forget."

He broke off abruptly, and made as if he would call to the guards outside.

Ted raised his arm in a gesture of appeal.

"Just one word more," he cried. "If you are determined to put an innocent man to death, then at least spare my friend here. He is a member of your own nation, and I swear he is innocent of any desire to harm you or your men. He has a wife. He has ten children. Do not make his wife a widow, his children orphans."

Ruffo smiled again, a wolf's smile.

"None must live to tell what has happened," he said. "You have spoken enough. Come."

For answer, Ted Scott's fist crashed like a pile-driver into Ruffo's jaw.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### The Shadow of the Noose

That terrific blow dealt by Ted Scott sent Ruffo to the floor. His head hit with a resounding thump and the fellow lay still.

His revolver had fallen from his hand, and the aviator pounced upon it.

"Quick, Bapo!" he cried, darting toward the door. "Follow me!" He flung open the door and dashed out nearly upsetting the startled guards. As they recovered their equilibrium, Ted caught one of them on the chin with his fist, while the revolver, held in his other hand, came crashing down on the skull of the second.

For the moment they were out of commission, and Ted, with Bapo close upon his heels, sped down the corridor.

The air pilot knew nothing of the interior arrangement of the prison. He had no idea as to where the corridor led or whether there would be an exit at the further end.

For the moment he was shielded from the

view of those in the courtyard by a high stone wall that ran along the side of the corridor. How long he would be invisible he did not know. He might emerge at any moment into the midst of a maddened mob, against whose overpowering numbers he would have no chance.

The door at the end of the corridor stood open. Ruffo and his guards had but recently passed through it, and as they were expected shortly to return with their prisoner it had been left ajar.

Luckily, the fugitives had as yet met no one in their mad dash for freedom.

As they neared the door, Ted slackened speed. Reaching it, he peered out cautiously.

Only a few people were in sight directly in front of him. The great mass of them were at the right. They were out of Ted's line of vision, but he could hear the hum that rose from them as from a swarm of enraged bees.

A little way ahead of him Ted could see the open gate of the courtyard. Beyond it were several horses and mules browsing on the scanty herbage.

"Bapo," panted Ted to the Mexican, who was close beside him, "we must step down carelessly and slowly into the courtyard and get over to that gate. Do not run. Act as if you were one of the crowd. Perhaps they

may take no notice of us, thinking that we are some of their number. Keep your head down so that as little of your face may be seen as possible. It is perhaps our only chance for life. Can you do this, go slowly?"

"Si, señor," replied Bapo.

With an air of as utter indifference as he could muster, Ted Scott stepped down into the courtyard. He strolled lazily along with his head bent as though he were in conversation with Bapo, who, with an equal air of nonchalance, sauntered beside him.

Apparently no notice was taken of them. This may have been chiefly because most eyes were turned toward the window of the prison cell.

It was perhaps a hundred steps to the gate, but to Ted Scott it seemed miles. Yet he restrained his impatience, lest he arouse suspicion.

Forty steps! Fifty! Sixty! Ted's heart was beating like a trip hammer. It looked as thought he might make it.

Then behind him rang out a shout. The clattering of steps came down the corridor. A yell of rage rang out. But the yell was also one of warning.

"Stop them!" came the cry. "The prisoners! They are escaping! Stop them!"

Ted looked over his shoulder and saw the

guard he had felled with his fist in the corridor. Only half-stunned by the blow, he had recovered and realized what had happened.

A shot rang out and a bullet whistled by Ted's ear. Now there was a tremendous uproar from the crowd. Masses of men came rushing toward him.

"Run, Bapo!" shouted Ted. "For the horses!"

With their feet spurred by the shouts behind them, they rushed through the gate. The horses looked up from their browsing. None of them was tethered.

Ted chose the one nearest him and vaulted on the animal's back. Bapo leaped upon another. In a moment they were off, urging their horses to the limit.

A storm of bullets followed the fugitives, but they had thrown themselves flat on the horses' backs and escaped unscathed. A moment later they were out of range.

They clattered down the mountain trail, urging their mounts with hands and heels.

Glancing over his shoulders, Ted saw a dozen Mexicans mounting for the pursuit.

He and Bapo had had no time to pick their mounts. They had taken the first that came to hand. But Ted noted with satisfaction that they seemed to be sturdy beasts, probably as good as any at the command of their pursuers.

The dusk was gathering, and that was in favor of the fugitives. If they could hold off their enemies until darkness had fully fallen, their chances of escape would be good. In the blackness of the night they might be able to turn off to the left or right and their trail could not be followed.

To be sure, it might be taken up on the following morning, but by that time Ted hoped that he would have been able to put a safe distance between himself and those who thirsted for his life.

Ted's own weapons had of course been taken from him at the start of his imprisonment, but he had retained the one he had wrested from Ruffo.

Ruffo! Even in the absorbing excitement of the ride the young aviator could not forbear chuckling at the thought of the way he had knocked out that ruffian. The man would recover from the blow, but his dignity would never be the same again.

Ted peered anxiously ahead through the deepening dusk to see if he could discern the end of the trail. He was desperately anxious to reach comparatively level ground where, among the tall grasses, he might baffle his pursuers.

His ears told him that they were gaining upon him. Not rapidly but surely. And they

were so many that, even if some of their horses weakened, the rest would be able to keep up the chase.

The trail was growing less steep. The fugitives were approaching the plateau at its base. Ted's heart exulted. If they could only have a few minutes longer!

Then Ted's horse stepped into a hole and fell. The young aviator went whizzing over its head and struck the ground with a thud. Blackness settled over him.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### On the Brink of Doom.

When Ted Scott came to his senses he was conscious of a bumping and swaying that seemed as though it would shake his bones out of his body.

His head ached. He tried to steady his reeling brain. What had happened? Where was he? What was it that was shaking him to pieces?

The last question answered itself first. He was lying spread out on the back of a horse, where he had been thrown like a sack of wheat. A rope passed over him and around the horse's body kept him from falling.

It was utterly dark now, and all he could see about him was a mass of dark figures of men and horses. He was riding in the middle of the group. Once in a while a match flared up, lighting a cigarette, and by its flame he could see a dark, saturnine face, shaded by a sombrero.

Then it all came back to him—the escape,

the shots that had whistled after him, the hot chase down the mountain trail. What had stopped him? A bullet?

No, it could not have been that. He was not bleeding. Then he struck on the true solution. His horse must have stumbled. He, Ted, had been thrown and must have hit his head.

Well, it did not matter what the cause had been. The fact, the portentous fact, was that he was again a prisoner. He had made a gallant dash for freedom and had failed.

But Bapo? How about him? Had the faithful fellow made good his escape?

He looked as far as his dimmed eyes and the darkness would permit at the group about him, but could not detect the presence of his comrade.

Now Ted realized that they had reached the level space on which the little town stood and were entering the courtyard.

The cavalcade stopped and Ted was lifted from his horse and stood roughly upon his feet. Then he was taken to the cell from which he had escaped and thrust into it with such force that he had all he could do to maintain his balance.

His hands, he found, had been securely tied, so cruelly indeed that the cords bit into his

flesh. His captors were taking no chances of his eluding them again.

A moment later the door was again opened and Bapo was pushed within. A pang shot through Ted's heart.

"Bapo!" he cried. "I hoped that you had given the slip to these bloodhounds. Did your horse stumble too?"

"No, señor," the Mexican replied. "But I saw you fall and I could not leave you. I had lifted you up and was trying to hold you on my horse when the men came up."

Ted's eyes grew moist and his voice was shaky.

"And you did this for me when you might have made your escape!" he said huskily, as he grasped his companion's hand.

"Why not?" said Bapo simply. "The señor would have done the like for me."

Ted was about to reply when the door burst open and Ruffo came rushing in, followed by two of his guards. His face was frightful.

"So, my fine Americano," he cried, "I have you once again!"

"You had me before, but you couldn't hold me," returned Ted.

"The rope will hold you this time," shouted Ruffo. "You will not escape me again. A few minutes from now and you will be food for

the worms. If I had time, I would make it take a day for you to die. I would listen to your screams as you prayed for death. And I would laugh, oh, how I would laugh! But my men will not wait. They want to see you struggle with the rope around your neck. They want to hear you beg for mercy."

"They will be disappointed, then," returned Ted calmly. "I know how to die, but I do not know how to beg. Listen, Ruffo. You are a coward and a cur. You would not dare to meet me in open fight. Even now you cannot look me in the eye. I am bound and you are not, but your eyes would fall first."

The guards looked at Ruffo eagerly to see if he would accept the challenge. He tried to. But before the icy and half-amused contempt in Ted's eyes his own wavered and fell.

"I told you so," remarked Ted. "You are a coward, Ruffo. Now go ahead and do your worst."

"Seize him, guards!" cried Ruffo furiously. "Drag him out and bring the other fellow with him, too."

The guards obeyed and hustled the bound prisoners out into the square before the court-yard. There they were greeted with angry shouts. The mob pressed about them. One swarthy-skinned fellow clutched Ted by the arm, but was beaten off by the armed guards.

Horses were brought and Ted and Bapo were lifted on them. Evidently the execution was to take place at a distance.

They rode for about ten minutes and then Ruffo called a halt. From a tree near by dangled a grisly thing, a man, or some one who had once been a man, swinging from the end of a rope. That tree had witnessed one tragedy, probably many. Now it was about to claim other victims.

The sight of that swinging body filled Ted with a sick repulsion. He turned his eyes away as he saw two men swarm up the trunk to cut the thing down.

In a moment, unless some miracle occurred, Ted Scott and Juan Bapo would be swinging from that limb, grotesque, twisted caricatures of death.

Ted did not fear death, but he hated that form of it. Why had he not taunted Ruffo sufficiently to cause that ruffian to send a bullet to his heart?

The events of his life swam before him. He saw that magnificent flight across the Atlantic and later across the Pacific; he heard again the congratulations of rulers, the plaudits of crowds. And this was to be the end of it all! To die the death of the vilest criminal, the most degrading and infamous kind of death!

His thoughts turned to those dearest to him.

Dear old Eben and Charity. Their hearts would be broken if they ever heard of his end. He prayed that they never would. And Walter Hapworth, Tom Ralston, Paul Monet, the host of friends who cherished him!

But he must not think of what would unman him. These mongrels should see how an American could die.

Rough hands dragged him from his horse. They did the same to Bapo. Then their captors led the airmen beneath the tree.

Ted looked up and saw the eyes of Bapo fixed upon him.

"Farewell, señor," said Bapo. "Perhaps we meet again."

"Who knows?" returned Ted. "If we do, I will meet a dear friend and a brave man. Farewell, Bapo."

A noose was slipped around Ted's neck. The same grim office was performed for Bapo. A log was rolled forward and their feet were placed on it. The free end of the rope had already been slung over the branch of the tree, its end was held by three men.

At a given signal Ted knew that the log would be rolled from beneath their feet. The rope would draw taut.

He drew himself erect and faced the crowd fearlessly.

"You men are murderers," he said in a

clear, unshaken voice, "and the worst murderer is your leader. Some day you will pay for this. My country will not forget."

Ruffo scowled and raised his pistol. Ropes had been fastened about the log. Men stood ready to drag it away.

"I will count three," said Ruffo. "A shot from my pistol will be the signal. Pull hard on the rope."

The men nodded impatiently and scowled at their victims.

Ruffo began to count.

"One—two—"

What was that?

Ruffo lowered his pistol and swung about. The others imitated the gesture, wonder and consternation on their faces.

Hoofbeats thundered along the trail, the sound of many horses driven at great speed.

The clatter brought a thrill of hope to Ted, standing with the rope around his neck.

Had a miracle happened? Was rescue at hand?

Into the open space dashed a body of horsemen. In the uncertain light of the torches Ted could get no clear idea of their number. One man stood out from the rest, however, not only by his great stature but by his air of command.

"Copenez!" thought Ted, his heart beating high.

It was indeed Copenez. The rebel leader had a grizzled beard and thick iron-gray hair. His eyes were keen and piercing, his expression stern.

With one quick glance he took in the scene; then dismounted and came over to Ruffo.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

An animated conversation took place between the chief and his next in command that Ted could not hear and the purport of which he could only guess, guided by their gestures and the looks that were directed toward him.

However, it was only too clear to Ted that Copenez was being prejudiced against him by the wily Ruffo. A red flush suffused the face of Copenez. Doubtless Ruffo was telling him of those sinister markings on the plane. It was becoming increasingly evident that Ted would be given little or no chance to explain.

Copenez turned to others of his men, evidently seeking corroboration of Ruffo's story. What he heard seemed to convince him. He swung himself around facing Ted, his eyes flaming, his face convulsed with passion.

"Dog! Spy!" he shouted, and raised his pistol until it covered Ted's heart. "It is fitting that Copenez and Copenez only should show you how he deals with spies."

"Copenez!" shouted Ted. "Listen! Hear me! Hear me!"

The finger of the chief tightened on the trigger.

Again the clatter of hoofs on the mountain trail. Copenez turned as a rider dashed up to him. A small, panting, flaming figure flung itself from the horse. It sped across to Ted and whirled about, arms outstretched, protecting him from the threat of death.

"Conchita!" The voice of Copenez came harsh, grating. "I told you not to follow me. How dare you disobey me?"

"Because I heard of this terrible thing that is being done here," the girl flamed at him. "Because I heard that this young man was being put to death. And because now that I see him I know who he is."

There was irony in the voice of Copenez as he mocked gently:

"Then who is he, Conchita, you who know? Tell us, little one."

"I will tell it gladly to you, to the whole world," cried the girl. "Uncle Manuel, he is the one of whom I told you! He is the gallant one, the brave one that saved me from Antonio Mendez!"

## CHAPTER XXV

### From the Jaws of Death

The pistol of Copenez dropped to his side. A flush of color surged over his face.

"Are you sure, little one?" he asked in a voice that shook.

"Yes," cried the girl, a rush of tears coming to the relief of her overcharged nerves. "Could I ever forget the face of the man who saved me? Oh, he is so noble, so brave!"

"And I was going to shoot him!" exclaimed Copenez, crossing himself. "May the saints forgive me!"

He hurried over to Ted and with his own hands removed the noose. Then he threw his arms about him and embraced him.

"To my heart!" he cried. "You may be an enemy, as Ruffo says, but you are safe with me. Not a hair of your head shall be harmed. To me you are the saviour of my little Conchita from that beast of a Mendez! Conchita, the darling of my heart, the niece who has been to me as a daughter since her

father died! Cut these cords," he commanded the wondering men standing about. "Quick! And those of this other man, his comrade," he added, pointing to Bapo. "From now on these men are my guests, my honored guests, do you hear?" his fierce eyes sweeping the circle, "and woe be to him who harms to the slightest degree the guests of Copenez."

In a trice these orders were obeyed. The bonds were cut and Ted and Bapo stepped down from the log that was to have been their scaffold.

The sudden change of affairs had struck Ruffo speechless. Surprise, chagrin, and fear swept over his features. Gone was all his arrogance. But he ventured to stammer a feeble protest.

"But, General," he began. "The markings on the plane—"

Copenez whirled upon him.

"May mean nothing! There is something very strange about this, Ruffo. How dared you assume the right to judge till I returned? Who gave you authority to usurp my power? You fly too high, my bird. Beware lest I clip your wings."

"It—it was zeal in your service, Excellency," stammered Ruffo, now thoroughly cowed.

"Misplaced zeal," snapped Copenez. "I will have talk with you later about this matter.

Give me your best horses for this brave man and his friend. They go with me to my house. They will dine with me. My house shall be theirs. And beware of tricks, Ruffo. If the least hurt comes to them, you shall answer for it with your life."

While this colloquy was in progress Ted had approached Conchita. The girl was gazing at him with a look in her eyes that no normal young man would have found unpleasant. Ted Scott was a normal young man.

"Señorita," he said, as he took the soft little hand she extended to him, "how can I thank you? You have saved my life."

"Did not the señor save me from Mendez?" she answered, in a musical voice. "I shall never be able to pay that debt. I thank the saints that I was able to get here in time."

"Come, Conchita, my little one," interrupted Copenez. "Mount your horse and we will go home. And you, señor," he said addressing Ted, "if you will so far honor me, come with us. Your friend, also," he added, including Bapo with a wave of his hand.

The cavalcade set out with Copenez at its head and Ted and Conchita riding side by side. In a short time they reached the large house that, as Ted had already conjectured, was that of the chief.

There every facility that could add to their

comfort was placed at the disposal of the two aviators thus unexpectedly saved from death.

To Ted's relief he found that both Copenez and Conchita spoke excellent English, for while the young flyer's Spanish served for ordinary business and traveling needs, it did not carry him far in general conversation. Indeed, it was from a school in the States that Conchita had been returning when her train had been held up by the bandit.

"Your Excellency," Ted took occasion to say as he was shown to his seat at the table, "I am overwhelmed by the kindness you have shown to me. It is all the more generous of you because in your heart you may even now suspect that I am in the pay of or in sympathy with your enemies. I want to assure you in the most solemn manner possible that this is untrue. The markings on the plane were put there unknown to me, probably by some one who wanted to hinder the success of my mission to you.

"That mission was from the Mexican Government to you. They have the friendliest feelings toward you. They know you had grievances and they have arranged to remove these. They are offering to you all and more than you have claimed to be your right, as you will see when you have read the papers I have brought. They respect and esteem you and

want to work with you in the heartiest coöperation. This I say to you on my word of honor."

A flush of gratification overspread the grizzled face of Manuel Copenez.

"It is well," he said. "I will not disguise from you that my heart has been sore at certain actions of the National Government, actions that seemed to require armed resistance. Perhaps there have been misunderstandings on both sides. I will look at your papers carefully and with an open mind. Do you have them with you?"

"No, señor," replied Ted. "They are in a secret compartment of my plane," and he gave the details of his landing near the city of Tolura.

Copenez listened with the greatest attention.

"You shall have an escort and shall go tomorrow to get the papers," he said. "Until then let us talk no more about business. Tell us again, Conchita, of how the señor rescued you from Mendez. We have been traveling so much that I have not yet had the full details," he explained to Ted. "My absence at this time from Aleriva was due to my desire to meet my niece at the distant railroad station to which her train brought her. We have been on the move ever since."

"I see," said Ted. "But there is really no need for the señorita to say anything more about the matter of Mendez. I happened to be there at the time and did what any honest man would have done. That is all."

"All!" exclaimed Conchita, her eyes sparkling. "'That is all,' he says. But he is as modest as he is brave. Listen, Uncle Manuel!" and she launched into an animated description of the event, although she was, of course, unacquainted with the details.

Copenez listened with profound emotion.

"Brave! Brave!" he exclaimed when Conchita had finished her recital. "The heart of a lion! To beard Antonio Mendez and his band practically single-handed! Señor, I am your servant for life. You have preserved for me the light of my life, the jewel of my heart. Honor me by taking my hand."

He reached across the table and took Ted's hand in a grip of iron.

"By the way," he resumed in a lighter tone to conceal how deeply he was moved, "I have not yet heard your name, señor. It is unpardonable that I have not asked."

"My name is Scott," replied Ted.

"Scott!" repeated Conchita quickly, as a thought struck her. "And an aviator! Oh, you are—it is so—can it be that you are the great Ted Scott, the one the Americanos adore,

the one who flew over the Atlantic Ocean and over the Pacific to Honolulu?"

Again those lovely eyes made Ted's heart skip a beat.

"You put it too strongly," he said, flustered. "But yes, my name is Ted Scott."

Then excitement reigned as Copenez and his niece showered the young aviator with questions expressive of their wonder and admiration.

"We are proud beyond expression that we are privileged to entertain a guest whose name is a household word all over the world," they told him.

When at last the group broke up and Ted Scott was shown to his room he knew that his mission had been successfully accomplished. Copenez had capitulated unconditionally.

As for Conchita—

The next day Copenez himself accompanied Ted with an escort to the place where he had left his plane. To his delight, Ted found that the machine was uninjured. The papers were found in the secret compartment intact and handed over to the chief. A truck was obtained in the near-by city of Tolura, where the name of Copenez acted like magic, and full supplies of fuel and food were brought out and placed in the *Silver Streak*. And it was Copenez him-

self who, abandoning his horse, had his first airplane ride back with Ted to Aleriva.

The next day Copenez spent in conference with his counselors, while the young aviator did not find the time going slowly in the society of Conchita.

In the evening Manuel Copenez delivered to Ted his answer to the Mexican Government. It was a complete acceptance of the Government propositions, and Ted exulted as he stowed the precious documents in the compartment of his plane. He had won!

Ruffo in the meantime had been brought to book by Copenez as to his conduct during the absence of the chief. The interview was a stormy one and from it Ruffo emerged drooping and shaken. He had narrowly escaped being placed before a firing squad, and probably would have been if it had not been for Ted's intercession. Ted owed the ruffian nothing, but he was a generous enemy. He wanted nobody's blood. As it was, Ruffo was stripped of his rank and emoluments. His wings had been effectually clipped.

The next morning dawned bright and beautiful without a cloud in the sky. Ted took it as an augury, for he planned to start that day for Mexico City. Now that his mission had been accomplished he was eager to get back

to the capital and from there to the States.

Copenez and Conchita had pressed him to prolong his visit. But Ted Scott knew that the utmost anxiety was being felt for him by his friends because of the unexpected length of his stay, and he had to refuse their entreaties.

Copenez gripped his hand in parting until Ted winced. But he winced still more when he saw Conchita's eyes say things the girl would never have permitted herself to put into words.

"Adios, señor," she said softly. "May God have you in His holy keeping. I shall never forget—" she was going to say "you" but checked herself—"your bravery and goodness."

"Nor I," said Ted gently, "that you saved my life. Adios, señorita."

With a wave of the hand he settled himself in his seat and the *Silver Streak* soared away into the skies.

If bad luck had dogged Ted on his way to the stronghold of Copenez, he had nothing but good luck on his way back. No bandits, no storm, no lightning bolt, no forced landing. Everything worked to a charm. The gallant plane winged her way straight as an arrow to the Mexican capital.

All through the day she whizzed along and

to such purpose that before midnight the *Silver Streak* was hovering over the flying field of Mexico City. To the sleepy officials of the field Ted stated that he had been on a little flying excursion, and committed the plane to their charge with strict injunctions to watch it well.

Then Ted Scott and Juan Bapo clasped hands in a lingering grip and bade each other farewell for the night, arranging to meet the next day. Bapo hurried home to his wife and children and Ted hailed a taxicab and was whirled to his hotel. There, after stating that he must positively not be disturbed that night, he slipped up to his room.

He had to pass Walter Hapworth's room and noted that a light was still showing through the transom. He knocked. An indifferent voice bade him enter.

Hapworth was seated at a table, his head in his hands, evidently a prey to the deepest dejection. He looked up dully, expecting to see a bellboy.

Then, with a wild shout, he jumped from his seat and threw his arms about the young aviator, hugging him like a bear.

"Ted, by all that's good!" he cried, in vast delight. "What—when—how—and I who feared that I would never see you again!"

It was some time before the two friends

could speak coherently. Then Ted began his narration, which, with Hapworth's frequent interruptions, lasted far into the night and would have lasted till daylight if it had not been for Ted's imperative need of sleep.

He could snatch only a few hours and was up betimes and on his way to the United States Embassy. The Argus-eyed reporters had found out about his arrival the night before and special editions of the morning papers were full of it. So he found the Ambassador eagerly awaiting his coming.

To him Ted related the essential facts of his journey, though he glossed over as much as possible his encounter with the bandits. The Ambassador was jubilant.

"Once more you have put your country in your debt," he declared warmly, as he wrung Ted's hand. "Now with the nation here at peace, I can carry out negotiations that will be of immense benefit to our own country. Thanks, a thousand times!"

Valdez was waiting impatiently in an anteroom, and to him Ted next repaired, handing over to him the friendly message from Copenez. The young diplomat's relief and delight were beyond words. His career had been saved and he would be credited with a brilliant diplomatic triumph.

"And to think that you will let me do nothing for you in return!" he mourned when his first transports had subsided.

"Not a thing for me, Señor Valdez," returned Ted. "But if you feel that you owe me anything, you might use your good offices in behalf of a friend of mine. It is nothing but justice that he asks and an impartial hearing in the courts."

"Speak," said Valdez. "It is done before you ask."

He listened intently while Ted told him of the obstacles that had been put in Hapworth's way by the grafting officials who had sought to pervert justice. His brow darkened.

"It is a shameful story," he declared when Ted had finished. "I had no idea such a state of things existed. It shall be stopped at once. Tell your friend to have no fear. He shall have every opportunity to press his case without hindrance."

He was as good as his word, and Ted had the satisfaction a month or so later of hearing from Hapworth that he had won a sweeping legal victory and been reinstated in his rights.

It was a keen pleasure for Ted to hear from Hapworth also that the rascals, Ramirez and Alvaron, were behind the bars. They had been arrested for participation in a daring bank

robbery in which they had been caught red-handed. They had been sentenced to twenty years in prison.

The markings on the plane still remained a mystery that was not cleared up until later when Ramirez died in prison. To the priest who attended him in his last illness he made a full confession of his many crimes and absolved the priest from all need of secrecy. Among other things he stated that he and his confederate had had, through a half understood sentence overheard by Alvaron's cousin, a servant in the United States Embassy, an inkling of Ted's mission and had put the symbol there in the hope that it might get the aviator into serious trouble with Copenez.

At about the same time Ted also learned that the bandit Mendez had died "with his boots on" in a skirmish with Federal troops sent out to apprehend him.

Ted Scott stayed in Mexico City only two days after his return to the capital. He had sent a telegram to Eben and Charity apprising them of his safety and promising to be with them as soon as possible.

Invitations were showered upon him that he was compelled to refuse. Reporters buzzed about him, but to all inquiries as to where he had been he returned polite but evasive answers accompanied by a smile that disarmed

criticism. The secret of Valdez was safe with Ted Scott.

One thing he found time to do, and that was to provide handsomely for Bapo. The roll of bills he handed him made the faithful fellow's eyes bulge. Hapworth was equally generous, and Valdez promised to watch over his future. It was clear that that wife and the ten children would never come to want.

"No thanks, Bapo," said Ted, when Bapo protested that he was too generous. "We aviators have got to hang together. We nearly did, at that," he added, with a grin.

The morning came for Ted Scott's departure. Mr. Hapworth was with him as he made the last inspection of his plane.

"Seem somewhat absent-minded this morning, Ted," remarked Hapworth. Then he added with a mischievous glint in his eyes:

"Thinking perhaps of the fair Conchita?"

"No," returned Ted with a smile. "She's a charming girl and will make somebody a lovely wife. But as for me, I have only one sweetheart. Eh, old girl?" and he patted the *Silver Streak* caressingly.

THE END

# TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

By FRANKLIN W. DIXON

Illustrated. Every Volume Complete in Itself.

You'll like Ted Scott. He's a daring young American whose feats of flying thrill the whole world, but with it all he keeps a level head on his shoulders. The whole flying series has been inspired by recent aerial exploits and is dedicated to Lindbergh, Commander Byrd, Clarence Chamberlin and other heroes of the skies.

OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS
RESCUED IN THE CLOUDS
OVER THE ROCKIES WITH THE AIR MAIL
FIRST STOP HONOLULU
THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST FLYERS
SOUTH OF THE RIO GRANDE
ACROSS THE PACIFIC
THE LONE EAGLE OF THE BORDER
FLYING AGAINST TIME
OVER THE JUNGLE TRAILS
LOST AT THE SOUTH POLE
THROUGH THE AIR TO ALASKA
FLYING TO THE RESCUE
DANGER TRAILS OF THE SKY
FOLLOWING THE SUN SHADOW
BATTLING THE WIND
BRUSHING THE MOUNTAIN TOP
CASTAWAYS OF THE STRATOSPHERE

GROSSET & DUNLAP *Publishers* NEW YORK

# Spotlight Books for Boys

Thrilling best-seller tales of mystery and adventure.

MYSTERY HOUSE ..... *R. J. Burrough*

THE LONE RANGER
THE LONE RANGER AND THE MYSTERY RANCH
THE LONE RANGER AND THE GOLD ROBBERY
*Fran Striker*

FLASH GORDON ..... *Alex Raymond*

TAILSPIN TOMMY ..... *Mark Stevens*

THE G-MEN SMASH THE "PROFESSOR'S" GANG
*Wm. Engle*

THE G-MEN IN JEOPARDY .....*Laurence Dwight Smith*

SMILEY ADAMS .....*R. J. Burrough*

HAWK OF THE WILDERNESS.....*William L. Chester*

MYSTERY OF THE YELLOW TIE.....*L. Dwight Smith*

JIMMY DRURY: CANDID CAMERA DETECTIVE
JIMMY DRURY: WHAT THE DARK ROOM REVEALED
*David O'Hara*

THE PONY EXPRESS ..... *Forman and Woods*

THE IRON HORSE ..... *Edwin C. Hill*

GROSSET & DUNLAP : *Publishers* : NEW YORK